Shriram Venkatraman

SOCIAL MEDIA IN SOUTH INDIA

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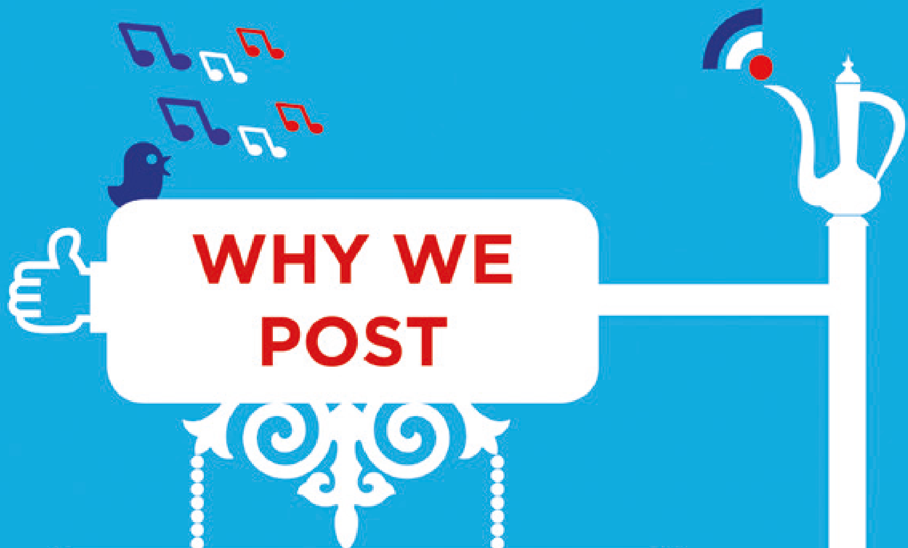
Social Media in South India



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Why We Post

Social Media in South India

Shriram Venkatraman

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Introduction to the series Why We Post

This book is one of a series of 11 titles. Nine monographs are devoted to specific field sites (including this one) in Brazil, Chile, China, England, India, Italy, Trinidad and Turkey – these have been published in 2016–17. The series also includes a comparative book about all our findings, *How the World Changed Social Media*, published to accompany this title, and a book which contrasts the visuals that people post on Facebook in the English field site with those on our Trinidadian field site, *Visualising Facebook*.

When we tell people that we have written nine monographs about social media around the world, all using the same chapter headings (apart from Chapter 5), they are concerned about potential repetition. However, if you decide to read several of these books (and we very much hope you do), you will see that this device has been helpful in showing the precise opposite. Each book is as individual and distinct as if it were on an entirely different topic.

This is perhaps our single most important finding. Most studies of the internet and social media are based on research methods that assume we can generalise across different groups. We look at tweets in one place and write about 'Twitter'. We conduct tests about social media and friendship in one population, and then write on this topic as if friendship means the same thing for all populations. By presenting nine books with the same chapter headings, you can judge for yourselves what kinds of generalisations are, or are not, possible.

Our intention is not to evaluate social media, either positively or negatively. Instead the purpose is educational, providing detailed evidence of what social media has become in each place and the local consequences, including local evaluations.

Each book is based on 15 months of research during which time the anthropologists lived, worked and interacted with people in the local language. Yet they differ from the dominant tradition of writing social science books. Firstly they do not engage with the academic literatures

on social media. It would be highly repetitive to have the same discussions in all nine books. Instead discussions of these literatures are to be found in our comparative book, *How the World Changed Social Media*. Secondly these monographs are not comparative, which again is the primary function of this other volume. Thirdly, given the immense interest in social media from the general public, we have tried to write in an accessible and open style. This means we have adopted a mode more common in historical writing of keeping all citations and the discussion of all wider academic issues to endnotes.

We hope you enjoy the results and that you will also read our comparative book – and perhaps some of the other monographs – in addition to this one.

Acknowledgements

This book is a product of my doctoral research (2012–16) undertaken while at the Department of Anthropology, University College London. The research was a part of a larger project called the 'Global Social Media Impact Study' (GSMIS), also popularly known as 'Why We Post – The Anthropology of Social Media', dedicated to understanding the impact of social media in nine different field sites in eight different countries around the world. This would not have been possible without the generous financial support from the European Research Council (grant ERC-2011-AdG-295486 Socnet) and the Department of Anthropology, UCL.

I am particularly indebted to my mentor and supervisor Prof. Daniel Miller and my project team: Elisabetta Costa, Nell Haynes, Tom McDonald, Razvan Nicolescu, Jolynna Sinanan, Juliano Spyer, Xinyuan Wang and the two amazing project managers Pascale Searle and Laura Haapio-Kirk, all of whom started as colleagues and have gone on to become close friends through the years of the project. I am also particularly grateful to my second supervisor Lucia Michelutti, the faculty members at the Department of Anthropology and my cohort of doctoral students for their encouragement and extremely valuable suggestions throughout this research.

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This research would have been impossible without my anonymous informants. I am extremely grateful for their trust, time, patience and interest in sharing their offline and online lives with me.

Note

All four maps (figs 1.1–1.4) are screenshots from Google Earth intending to showcase the field site and the scale of development. (Non commercial use of Google Earth - https://www.google.co.uk/permissions/geoguidelines.html)

The field work was conducted between April 2013 and August 2014. The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu at that time was Ms J. Jayalalitha. However, as of 2017 there has been a shift in the political situation of Tamil Nadu with the demise of Ms J. Jayalalitha.

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Panchagrami and its complexities

On a blistering summer afternoon in April 2013, a 24-year-old man named Selva, the first graduate in his family, met me at a roadside tea stall to recount his experience of social media. He had first discovered Facebook four years earlier, while in college, and since then had also explored WhatsApp. He had experimented with Twitter, but his sojourn there had been short-lived. He was intimidated by the platform and said you needed to be an English 'Peteru' (a colloquial phrase for a show-off in the use of English) to tweet and get followers.

Selva spoke of how much he loved Facebook and WhatsApp. He boasted about how he had accumulated female friends on Facebook, some of whom had become sufficiently close that their chats had moved from Facebook to WhatsApp. Throughout the conversation he praised the positive impact of social media on his personal life.

Two months later, however, Selva had closed his Facebook account and was chatting only through WhatsApp. When we met at the same tea stall, he cursed Facebook as having spoilt his life and family honour. A few weeks earlier he had discovered that his younger sister, a 17-year-old high school student, was having a romantic relationship with a fellow student at his university, in a lower year: the student was also from a different caste[1] group than the siblings. Both had met and friended each other via Selva's Facebook profile. When Selva's parents and extended family got to know of this, they blamed him for encouraging his sister to be on social media. His family viewed his sister's romance as disrespectful to the family and caste honour. For his part, an irate Selva closed both his own and his sister's accounts on Facebook.

Selva lamented that he should have listened to his kin and friends from his village who had warned him not to allow his sister access to a mobile phone or to Facebook. They had told him that it was his primary duty to safeguard his sister from the 'romantic clutches' of young

men from other castes who were on the lookout for such vulnerable women. They had also told him that an ideal young unmarried Tamil woman would not be seen on such a dangerous platform, nor with a mobile phone.

A week later, in an upmarket coffee shop just a few hundred yards away from the tea stall, Vijaya, a software professional in her mid-twenties, explained her journey on social media. She was married with a two-year-old daughter and was then five months pregnant with her second child. She was on multiple social media platforms, with some dormant accounts on Facebook and Twitter and more active accounts on WhatsApp and LinkedIn. WhatsApp connected her family while LinkedIn took care of her professional interests. Leaving her toddler at a nursery close to her workplace was a source of guilt for Vijaya, as it went against her in-laws' expectations of an ideal mother. She found out that the nursery, which largely catered to parents in the IT sector, offered a service of hourly WhatsApp updates on the children throughout the day for an additional fee. She had immediately opted for this service, since taking note of what her daughter did throughout the day assuaged her guilt and allowed her to monitor her child through WhatsApp.

This book is a narrative description of a 15-month ethnography[2] of social media in a peri-urban area, next to the city of Chennai in Tamil Nadu. This region of South India is undergoing a rapid transformation from a rural to an urban landscape owing to an Information Technology (IT) revolution, which started at the turn of this century when the government decided to set up a special economic zone catering to the IT sector in the midst of five rural villages. We will henceforth refer to this area as 'Panchagrami'.[3] The arrival of the IT sector made Panchagrami a setting in which tradition met with modernity and the local encountered the global. It seemed appropriate to connect a study of social media with a setting that includes one of the iconic examples of modernisation in India, namely a new IT hub.

Panchagrami has a populace of around 30,000. This combines a population of 14,000 long-term resident villagers who trace their ancestry to this area with around 16,000 newly settled residents; among the latter are people working in IT and in its associated service sector, entrepreneurs, small-time traders, construction workers and a host of other unskilled labourers looking for employment opportunities. In addition to these permanent residents, Panchagrami also caters to a floating population of 200,000[4] people who commute to work in the IT and other service sectors, including those that cater to the IT employees.

One of the assumptions for choosing this location was that it would enable me to understand the differences in social media usage between two distinct populations: the IT employees and the long-term resident villagers. While the former are urbanised, fairly affluent and thought to be expert users of social media, the latter are rural, less affluent and novices in the use of new technologies. With the start of the ethnography, however, it soon became apparent that the use of social media in both communities was actually governed by deeper layers of traditions influenced by social categories such as gender, kinship, age, caste, class, religion etc. and not just by a superficial dichotomy of IT employees and villagers. Such traditions, and the social categories that sustain them, are deeply embedded into the daily lives of the residents of Panchagrami and continue on to social media.

The case of Selva illustrated how he carried notions about caste, family honour, discourses about 'ideal' womanhood and notions of hyper masculinity[5] from his offline world to the online world of social media. Similarly, in Vijaya's case, she carried the expectations about ideal motherhood and tried to fulfil them by mothering through WhatsApp. The original intent behind this research might have led to these two cases being used to represent the difference between an IT employee (Vijaya) and the villager (Selva). However, a deeper layer of commonality connects both these cases. People bring their offline traditions into social media, be it in terms of gender, kinship, age, caste, religion, class etc. Tradition to a large extent is mapped onto social media and reasserted on it, thus reflecting offline social categories online as well. Online is also a place to which individuals on social media strive to bring along their social groups, for example friends and kin. In so doing they showcase social media as a group media, and perform on it for the wider world to see how they uphold normative Indian traditions.

This notion of continuity[6] between offline and online spaces is nothing new in the Indian context; indeed claims to continuity are themselves a fundamental part of Indian cosmological thinking. This is illustrated in the case of Nagamani, a 56-year-old owner of a hardware store at Panchagrami. Nagamani had lost his third son to cancer six years previously, and at the ceremony to mark the sixth anniversary of his son's death the ritual included the common offerings of food for the departed soul, known in Tamil as 'Padayal'. Next to the banana leaf with the food, however, there were items such as a fancy watch, a 'Cinthol'[7] perfumed soap, sunglasses, a 'Parker' ballpoint pen and an 'Axe'[8] deodorant. Nagamani explained that these were his son's favourite items, which he would need in his afterlife too. If a belief in continuities has an ability to transcend

space and time – whether from this world to the afterworld or from rural to urban[9] – it is no surprise that there can also exist continuity between the offline and the online.

The continuity of offline traditions and social categories into the online space of social media in Panchagrami takes various forms. One commonly observed offline tradition in social media is that of network homophily:[10] the concept of friending people from similar backgrounds. In Panchagrami, network homophily was practised specifically with regard to caste and class. This kind of in-group behaviour also gives rise to the sense of online 'otherness' as represented by everyone else. Interactions with the latter are then viewed as essentially functional rather than social.

This kind of network homophily also provides evidence for the emergence of digital inequality. One of the key findings of the entire project[11] was that online equality does not necessarily mean offline equality, and this certainly holds true in Panchagrami.

At one level the increasing affordability of communication technologies such as smartphones and internet data plans has created a growing level of equality of access. However, access to the same media does not translate to social equality online. Merely because one is *capable* of 'friending' people from different backgrounds does not mean that anyone will, especially if one of the people is from a lower socio-economic background.[12]

The maintenance of these more traditional groups also leads to an emphasis on social conformity expressed through social media interactions, be it through postings of visuals, texts or other responses. Most people tried to conform by strategically crafting and directing their communication to the expectations of their group. Expressing dissent within such groups took place privately or through indifference and silence. People also resorted to the creation of multiple profiles or fake identities on social media to express dissent to normative expectations. As we shall see, for some people the authentic self is now comprised of multiple identities expressed through different genres of posting on different platforms, and sometimes even on the same platform.

While it may seem as if the continuity between offline and online spaces influenced by social categories such as caste and class leads to socially different networks, in fact many commonalities rather than oppositions emerge when we look at their social media activities and responses (for example, their visual culture or network conformance), which are influenced by a deeper Tamil culture. This also explains the high degree of commonalities between the 'super groups' of IT professionals and

villagers. The different chapters of this book elaborate all of this in detail with examples derived from the ethnography.

This idea of continuity is better appreciated by first understanding the offline and the online spaces independently. This is precisely the task of the first two chapters. This chapter thus introduces Panchagrami, its residents and the social categories that underpin their everyday lives. It also examines the complexities arising from the radical juxtaposition of a massive knowledge economy fuelled by the IT sector and a traditional rural space dominated by agriculture.

This is followed in Chapter 2 by an exploration of the communication practices and the social media landscape. This chapter starts by examining the history of communication at Panchagrami and moves on to detail the use of different social media platforms across diverse social groups. Chapter 2 also examines how the norms associated with offline communication are also reflected in their social media interactions.

With an understanding of both the offline and the social media landscape of this area, we move on to explore one of the most common forms of social media communication at Panchagrami, the visual postings.[13] Chapter 3 serves to showcase how these visuals are most often only a continuation of offline visual practices. This is done by segregating the social media visuals into different categories as seen in the offline space, namely public genres, private posts and 'in betweeners'[14] (those placed between the public and the private). This chapter will also examine how people strategically craft their visual communication in accordance with social norms and tend to conform[15] to the expectations of their networks.

Central to the idea of conformity and normative group behaviour is kinship.[16] Chapter 4 thus focuses on the domestic sphere of family and kin relationships, which also become the primary domain for much of everyday communication; a detailed discussion of the major classes of kin relations is therefore required. Indeed the most commonly cited social category in India is essentially a kin category. Caste is based on endogamy[17] (an idea that no one marries outside of the caste they are born in), making caste in effect an extended unit of kinship. This brings with it several dimensions such as social control, surveillance, gendered space,[18] power, hierarchy, group performance etc. Some of these are best exhibited in the idea that it is the responsibility of Selva to safeguard his sister from the clutches of social media – and indirectly from the men who belong to other social groups and 'prowl' online. Social control can range from total prohibition to allowing restricted access to social media within one's home, where a young woman can be protected from other

dangerous masculine spaces.[19] Conversely the pressure of Vijaya's in-laws' expectations of ideal motherhood drives this professional woman to make WhatsApp a feminine space adapted for mothering.

Hierarchy and power within family circles are most visible when it comes to intergenerational communication, and specifically those forms that involve the elderly. Many older people try hard to dictate which platform is appropriate for communicating with them. In many families what should be conveyed through voice, what communication is considered too personal to be allowed on Facebook and what should be personally conveyed only through WhatsApp is more or less dictated by older family members. Most commonly, private familial communication is routed through WhatsApp, with Facebook used as a platform on which the entire family can perform to convey notions of ideal family life to the wider world. The intimacy expressed by fictive kin groups on social media is also discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 discusses how social media may undermine the boundaries between work and non-work spheres of life in a modern work setting. This is crucial, since the IT sector and other modern work settings were responsible for the socio-economic transformation in Panchagrami in the first place. This chapter shows how people conform to the authority of traditional social categories by tactfully mediating the authority of modern workplaces. Having been part of an agricultural economy until a decade ago, people never viewed work and non-work as dichotomous or as bounded areas; most often one flowed into another, and the boundaries between them were constantly in flux. This was to a certain extent true of the South Indian work culture in itself, where constant interactions with the non-work space were considered a part of everyday sociality. However, with the advent of the IT sector and its associated modern workplace norms, notions of work and non-work changed; while allowing work outside the office space was considered to be conforming with modern workplace expectations, bringing non-work aspects into the workplace was viewed as dissent and was frowned upon by management.[20] Social media has helped to circumvent such restrictions and undermine the strict boundaries of work and non-work in these settings. It is the older and prior forms of authority, such as caste and class, that now infiltrate the workplaces in the form of kinship-based[21] recruitment and familial communication through social media.

Chapter 6 then explores social media and education, describing in detail the tensions and the varying attitudes towards social media among various stakeholders, for example teachers, students, parents and the school system. In this chapter we examine the impact of social media within

education, a topic of particular importance given the way in which this field site resonates with the idea of a new knowledge economy.[22]

Gomathi, a 54-year-old teacher, explained over a nice, home-cooked lunch why social media was a waste of time and a distraction to students. She had strong views on why students should be discouraged from using it and cited several popular media articles which described the ills of social media. She was also opposed to teachers friending students as she felt this could reduce the amount of control that the former wielded in the classroom.

Picking up the ideas expressed by Gomathi, we shall see how social media has contributed to an inherent tension on how to align the traditional teacher–student hierarchy with a new relationship of 'Friend' on social media. Social class and the type of school system bring an additional layer of complexity to this already tenuous relationship among teachers and students on social media.

Having introduced the topics of the various chapters, we now move on to describe Panchagrami, its people and their lives in more detail.

Where is Panchagrami?

Panchagrami, a pseudonym for a group of five villages, is situated on the outskirts of the 375-year-old[23] metropolis of Chennai, in the state of Tamil Nadu, South India. It belongs to the district of Kanchipuram.[24]

These five villages, which occupy an area of around 14.25 sq. km, are discrete units and do not make up an administrative whole. For the purposes of this ethnography, the boundaries of Panchagrami are artificially drawn to describe this space under rapid transition (Fig 1.1).

Panchagrami is not a single strip of land, but comfortably occupies the two sides of a major road (called the Information Technology Highway) which runs from inside the city of Chennai to areas in Kanchipuram district, with just a part of the IT Highway passing through Panchagrami. Panchagrami is bordered on one side by the backwaters of the famous Chennai Buckingham Canal and is 2 km (1.25 miles) away from the Bay of Bengal, the sea that runs alongside the Tamil Nadu coastline. A few decades ago this canal served as an important waterway, which helped to boost trade in this area, but use of this waterway has since been discontinued for several reasons.[25] Although it is several decades since this took place, many of the area's elderly, long-term residents recount with fondness their memories of travel on this canal and regret the closing down of a beautiful waterway. If you want to get to the coastline now,

Fig. 1.1 An aerial view of Panchagrami (Google Earth map)

you must travel a few kilometres away from Panchagrami to get onto the link road that joins with another highway, which then has smaller roads connecting to the sea. To the west of Panchagrami are several paddy fields and a number of vacant lands, now being made available for real estate development catering to businesses, the IT sector and residential complexes. This western side borders onto another national highway that links southern Tamil Nadu to Chennai and to other states in India.

To the south of Panchagrami are a chain of other villages which go on to connect to a tenth-century Hindu pilgrimage centre for Lord Muruga (also known as a Tamil god), the son of Lord Shiva, one of the gods in the Hindu trinity. Further south is the UNESCO[26] World Heritage Site called *Mamallapuram* or *Mahabalipuram*[27], a port city of the Pallava dynasty,[28] which dates from the seventh century and is celebrated for its rock sculptures and architecture. To the north of Panchagrami is the city of Chennai (formerly known as Madras/Madarasapattnam/Chennapattnam).[29]

A drive on the highway to Panchagrami from the centre of the city of Chennai takes around an hour and a half. By this stage the landscape has changed from urban to peri-urban, with agricultural land adjacent to high-rise corporate buildings or residential complexes on both the sides of the highway. You are welcomed to Panchagrami by a discreet highway board announcing the name of one of the villages that forms Panchagrami; after that you might easily witness a herd of around 20 cows right in the middle of this road, along which the cars of IT workers pass

at high speeds. The powerful contrast between the remnants of these villages and their fields and a thriving modernity fuelled by the IT sector makes this an extraordinary sight.

What you do not expect to see in typical Tamil villages are outlets of KFC (Kentucky Fried Chicken) and Domino's Pizza. Yet on entering Panchagrami you behold them, occupying the ground floor of a vast multiplex cinema on one side of the road and a huge multi-storeyed apartment complex on the other side, followed by the offices of a major multinational Information Technology company. Both sides of the road are now packed with franchisees of bakeries and hair salons and several multi-storeyed residential apartments, as well as more traditional Indian village houses, restaurants, small eateries, roadside tea stalls, upmarket coffee shops, star hotels, supermarkets, smaller shops (selling hardware, mobile accessories etc.), a village market, huge corporate buildings catering to the Information Technology sector, international schools, village schools, colleges, hospitals and dispensaries, panchayat (village council) offices and roads that lead to paddy fields. The transportation in this area in a way reflects the transition and the growing economic prosperity. Public transport such as buses is common, but one can also find personal vehicles, for example cycles, mopeds, scooters, motorcycles and a range of cars, from affordable to luxury sedans. People's clothing also reflects the diversity of the landscape, in a spectrum ranging from traditional sarees and dhoties to salwar kameez, jeans, formal trousers, T-shirts and shirts.

Panchagrami also plays host to a large Special Economic Zone. This caters to several Information Technology conglomerates and is now under expansion, but still retains vast, underdeveloped plots of land typical of the area's landscape a decade ago. Several abstract accounts discussing India's current development as an emerging economy are made visual and immediate at Panchagrami.

A brief history of Panchagrami

The villages that constitute Panchagrami were formed when families belonging to particular caste[30] groups settled in this area around 150 to 200 years ago.

The villages' proximity to an ancient temple town and an ancient port city raise the possibility that Panchagrami has a history dating back further than this wave of settlement. Scholarly works on Pallava administration and Mammalapuram,[31] as well as oral history gathered from this area, have suggested some links. These have been

further validated by the still-visible relics of a few stone 'mandapams' or rest houses, and the waterless tanks and lakes of the region, now being used for sand mining. Such construction accords with the policy of the Pallavas, known to have built huge tanks and rock/stone rest houses for travellers. There are smaller temples to the gods Shiva[32] and Vishnu[33] around this area, while a 1000-year-old Vishnu temple[34] lies a little further to the north of Panchagrami.

Infrastructural development post 1990

The Information Technology sector started booming in India by the mid-1990s, just after the liberalisation of the Indian economy.[35] Bangalore and Hyderabad were the first centres that saw huge growth and infrastructural developments related to this sector. Chennai was next in line, and the establishment of a well-known IT company in Panchagrami in the late 1990s laid the foundation for the area's subsequent and rapid transformation. At first the grand entry of the IT sector into Chennai proved rather slow but steady. The first few IT companies that were established in the city were initially quite dispersed, until the year 2000, when Tidel Park, a huge Special Economic Zone catering specifically to IT companies, was planned and established by the Government of Tamil Nadu inside the city of Chennai. The establishment of the Tidel Park attracted several IT companies to Chennai. Early in the 2000s Indian-based multinational companies such as TCS (Tata Consultancy Services – the IT subsidiary of the Tata group of companies) set up a huge complex adjacent to the area's new arterial road, which is now called the IT Highway.

As a result geographies that might merely have developed as outer suburbs of Chennai were designated for huge IT complexes. Panchagrami, being just outside Chennai, provided cheap land for easy occupation. This was why, in the year 2000, a Special Economic Zone that catered specifically to IT companies had been planned and established at Panchagrami by the Government of Tamil Nadu. As a sector-specific Special Economic Zone, this designation provided basic infrastructural facilities and the necessary tax deductions for IT/ITES[36] companies. Potentially it may lead to the area becoming integrated into the city of Chennai in the near future.

Panchagrami houses not only these leading Indian IT/ITES companies, but also residential apartments, built or under construction as

a housing investment option for these IT professionals, some of whom wish to live close to their workplaces. Following the growth of residential complexes catering to the IT population, a number of well-known private schools now work in tandem with housing construction companies to set up private schools for the children of these IT workers. Several small-time traders local to this area, as well as others who are newcomers, have also set up their businesses and shops to cater to this population.

Aerial view snapshots showing the infrastructural changes in Panchagrami over the last decade are provided below (Figs 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4).

Fig. 1.2 Panchagrami in 2002 (Google Earth map)

Fig. 1.3 Panchagrami in 2010 (Google Earth map)

Fig. 1.4 Panchagrami in 2014 (Google Earth map)

Though the long-term residents of Panchagrami acknowledge the considerable economic advantages gained through the emergence of the IT economy in this area, many also voice regrets in the same breath. Very often looking at the current six-lane highway, they fondly recall the days when the area had a one-way track with trees on either side, providing much-needed shade from the scorching sun to humans and animals alike. For example Vijayan, a 43-year-old long-term resident of Panchagrami, recalled his younger days there, when there was a smaller population and less traffic, describing it as the most environmentally friendly area. Today a few streets remain in Panchagrami which are reminiscent of the villages in the 1980s. With input from people such as Vijayan and others, a local artist helped to depict how Panchagrami would have looked then (Fig. 1.5).

By contrast, the subsequent image depicts Panchagrami as it now appears (Fig. 1.6).

The last couple of sections in this chapter have provided an overview of Panchagrami's history and the infrastructural changes that this area has undergone in the past decade. The next few sections offer an overview of the people and social structures now found in this area, and then move on to a brief discussion of the built environment of Panchagrami.

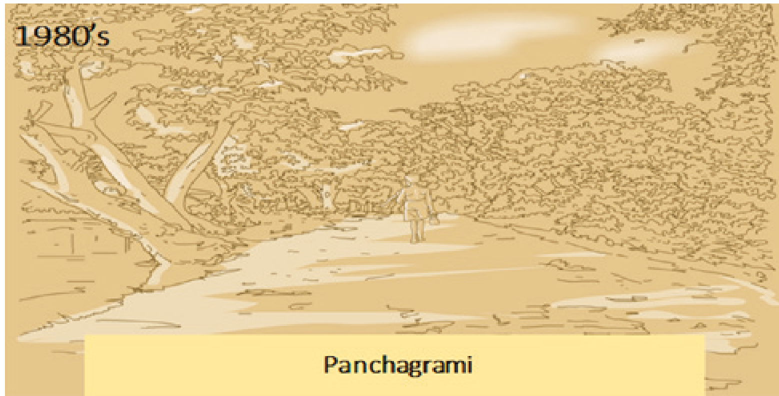


Fig. 1.5 An artist's depiction of Panchagrami in the 1980s

Fig. 1.6 Panchagrami in 2014

People of Panchagrami

Panchagrami, though predominantly Hindu, also has a sizeable population of Christians, while Muslims and Sikhs are found in smaller numbers. They can again be grouped into various economic, linguistic and caste categories. Panchagrami houses at least 10 Hindu temples of varied sizes, mostly medium to small. Annual temple festivals normally happen in July and August (the Tamil month of 'Aadi'), specifically well known for the worship of Amman, the Hindu mother goddess.

This area also houses a couple of small mosques and at least five churches. On Sundays one can see groups of women and children from the villages proceeding to the churches for services and mass throughout the day. Most Christians in the high-rise apartment complexes do not go to the local churches; instead, they attend their own denominational churches within the city of Chennai. Another part of Panchagrami wakes up every morning with the early morning 'Adhan', a call for worship from the mosques. Religious festivals such as Pongal/Sankaranthi, Diwali and Christmas are popular in this area, given the large population of Hindus and Christians.

The complexity of this area dawns when one considers the mixture of locals and migrants of various socio-economic backgrounds. Even with such a diverse population, it should be noted that most locals are Tamils[37] and therefore the major language spoken here is Tamil. As a result of migration, however, a growing number of people speak other Indian regional languages such as Telugu, Malayalam and Hindi, and fall into various economic categories. While English is mostly the language of choice in schools and IT companies, everyday transaction with the locals takes place in a mix of Tamil and English. People form groups within their own circles to celebrate regional festivals such as Onam,[38] Tamil/Telugu New Year[39] or even Karva Chauth.[40]

Local oral accounts posit that people speaking Telugu have lived in this area for around half a century. The locals also do not generally differentiate between the Telugu-speaking population and those speaking Tamil, in contrast to native Hindi speakers or people from other states of India, whom they regard as culturally and ethnically different.

Panchagrami accommodates a range of economic classes, from the very rich to the extremely poor. Several locals are either middle-class or have become wealthy in the past decade, due to selling land to the real estate and the construction sector. For ease of understanding, the rich or upper class would include the local millionaires, the most senior IT and corporate executives and businessmen who invest on properties in the region. The middle classes can be divided into the upper middle class (for instance, mid-level and senior managers in IT/corporate businesses, entrepreneurs) and the lower middle class (agriculturists, traders, entry-level IT employees etc). The lower classes or the poor are generally the agricultural labourers, hawkers etc. The poorest are the low-level migrant workers, ranging from the unskilled rag pickers to the semi-skilled astrologers and the construction workers who migrate in search of jobs, following the construction boom in Panchagrami. They live in groups and occupy small, temporary houses.

It is not uncommon for at least four people to stay in houses only 200 sq. ft in size.

Indian society is organised around ‘castes’, a social system which assigns a social status to an individual from birth. He or she thus belongs (theoretically for life) to an endogamous and socially distinct group. It is a derivative of the ancient Hindu *varna* system that categorised people based on their occupation, and has been around for at least 2,000 years. Over the centuries the occupation-based *varna* categorisation eventually became an identity bestowed on a person at birth, regardless of the actual occupation he or she chose to do later in life. The caste system in India was organised as a hierarchy and a social order, and thus movement between castes was impossible. While the *varna* system categorised the population into four groups, today the caste categories are innumerable, and are divided even further by subcastes.

The ills of the caste system are manifested in the discrimination that the so-called higher castes (such as the Brahmins) have historically shown towards the so-called lower castes (for example the Dalits). Though social thinkers such as B. R. Ambedkar[41] and Periyar[42] have argued for the annihilation of the caste system, it continues to exist and is deeply imprinted in the minds of the people; even if someone changes religion, they still retain their caste identity. While the castes are often identified by their local names (castes in Panchagrami include Chettiars, Brahmins, Mudaliars, Vanniyars, Dalits[43] and Irula Tribes, for example), for administrative reasons the Indian government[44] places these innumerable caste groups into five major categories: Other Castes, Backward Castes, Other/Most Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. This government categorisation has become almost as important as local terminology, especially in the realm of policies and politics.

At Panchagrami, caste names are mostly alluded to only in the case of locals who are long-standing inhabitants of this area. Most understand the hierarchical structure of the caste system and sometimes even refer to themselves and others based on this understanding. While caste would not come up in a general conversation with most people in this area, this is not to say that they shy away from referring to their castes when necessary. While certain locals refer to their castes in the government terms, several others specifically identify themselves with their traditional caste names.

The head of each of the original families who settled at Panchagrami around 150 years ago was referred to as ‘Thalakattu’. Before long this initial group expanded and was soon joined by other caste groups for trade, agriculture and other labour. The groups divided and reorganised

their lands and living areas, drawing their boundaries to prevent people of the lower castes from settling too close to higher-caste villages. Notions of 'pollution' and 'purity' arose, leading to demarcating territories as 'Ooru' (a space where so-called upper caste people lived) and 'Colony' (a space where so-called lower caste people lived). This demarcation of areas based on caste was a standard practice as documented in anthropological works on Tamil Nadu[45] and South India; it is not specific to this area alone.

Traditionally the economic structure was such that a few so-called upper castes would own lands and others would work as labourers in these lands. Wages were supplied in cash and kind (often involving a complex system of payment through distribution of the harvest). In the 1970s and 1980s schools in this area were run by the local village panchayats[46] and a few Christian missionaries; there were no university-level facilities in this area until the 1990s. So, for reasons of education and economic mobility, several so-called upper caste families migrated to Chennai. Some sold their lands to the people who worked for them (namely the Scheduled Castes or Dalits), who in turn sold their lands to the IT sector in the 2000s.

The Scheduled Castes or Dalits were earlier discriminated against by the so-called upper castes in this area, but over time some of them have achieved social and economic mobility; others have not. With their increased economic prosperity, some Dalits can be placed in the upper middle class, or even be described as rich. However, most Dalits in this area would fall under the broader categories of the lower middle class and lower classes.

Among the long-term residents, the poorest are a group of Scheduled Tribes called the Irula.[47] They are locally referred to as '*pambu pudikiravanga*' or snake catchers, their traditional occupation, and they live in tribal settlements around this area (Fig. 1.7). The Irulas in this settlement generally prefer boys to be educated rather than girls, but many males fail to achieve literacy. They drop out of schools to earn and supplement their family's income – not a surprising decision given the general level of poverty that exists within their community. Several young illiterate Irula women are sent as domestic workers to households in this area, providing the cheapest labour available at Panchagrami, while young Irula men are employed in low-status jobs; some still practise their traditional occupation of snake catching. The other locals in this area tend to identify the Irulas by their physical features, referring to them as people with usually dark skin and a general look of poverty. In comparison with other castes, very few Irula have jobs in even the lower rungs of the IT sector. However, this situation is gradually changing,

Fig. 1.7 Irula settlement in Panchagrami in 2014

with some of the younger Irula members starting to emerge from these traditional constraints.

The other caste groups that exist in this area can be placed under the broad government categories of Most Backward Castes, Backward Castes and the Other Castes, and most fall under the broad range of the middle classes. Some were former landowners who have become wealthy through the sale of lands to construction and real estate companies. They are influential in this area, owning buildings and lands that they have now rented out. Many are well educated and most youngsters hold at least a first degree. Some have their own businesses while others work for IT and other corporate companies.

The gender ratio of men and women in this area is around 1.1 to 1.0. While Panchagrami's official literacy rate is 76 per cent, and might go up by a few percentage points due to the newly settled skilled IT employees, there are cases where men and women of the lower classes have missed even basic education. The literacy level in this area is higher than India's average, and might even be equal to Tamil Nadu's average literacy rate.[48]

With the economic boom Panchagrami has attracted a lot of migrants, coming from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The poorer migrants find jobs as construction workers or as service providers

of various kinds (for example the cleaning staff in hotels as well as in the offices of IT companies). While the construction workers (often the poorest) have generally low levels of literacy and hail from Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal and Orissa, the service staff in hotels come from Manipur, Mizoram and even from Nepal, and are in general more literate.

The construction workers normally arrive in groups; they have a nomadic lifestyle and move from one construction site to another.[49] They live in each site based on the demand for labour and tend to move on after between six months and a year in each site. This group is largely unaccounted for in government censuses due to its migrant lifestyle. People live by the roadside, constructing temporary houses, or rent temporary accommodation from the locals. Similar are the cases of rag pickers and astrologers in Panchagrami, who hail from the south of Tamil Nadu and also tend to be nomadic in their lifestyles.

The IT professionals who migrate to this area to work in IT companies at entry level normally tend to remain for a maximum of two to three years. They are usually single and stay in hostels or shared accommodation with other such workers, or rent apartments. They often move away of their own volition, choosing to 'go onsite' (to work in foreign countries with active IT projects) within a couple of years. These transient workers may arouse criticism from the locals for causing general inflation in the area. However, people who occupy mid-level positions and are married usually stay here longer; some even invest in apartments.

Since there are at least two universities and 10 colleges around Panchagrami, a migrant student population is also found here. They stay here for four years (for degrees in engineering) or at least two to three years for degrees in other subjects. Engineering students come to study here from all over India, specifically from Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, Bihar, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa, Mizoram, Assam and Manipur. There are several small food stalls and restaurants in this area (around workplaces and educational institutions) which cater to this group.

Small-time traders migrate on a different scale at different levels and tend to be focused on the food business. They own tea stalls or restaurants. Restaurants catering for specific ethnic migratory groups are plentiful, for example Rajasthani Dhabas, Andhra Mess, Kerala Mess and so forth. Small-time hawkers selling cigarettes, chewing gum, sweets and mints erect temporary shops in front of IT companies; these are normally the preferred retail outlets for IT employees, removing the need for them to walk long distances during breaks to buy cigarettes.

This practice has encouraged several small-time hawkers to migrate into this area, catering specifically to the IT crowd. Tea stalls or tea 'Kadais' are a similar example. Several migrants have opened tea 'Kadais' in front of IT companies, catering both to IT staff and to construction workers. At a normal tea stall groups of employees (men and women) from IT companies can be seen hanging out together, but only men stand around the temporary cigarette stalls.

The boom in the construction sector for residential apartment complexes designed for middle- and upper-middle-class occupiers has also contributed to migration. Elderly retirees who prefer to stay in the suburbs of Chennai generally prefer to invest in homes in this area. Most retired people who settle down in this area have children living abroad or working in the IT sector. In addition, people who work in mid-level and senior-level positions also invest in properties in this area; so do wealthy businessmen from Chennai, who tend to move here with their families. A rough estimate of non-IT people in these apartment complexes would be around 30 per cent.

Transformation of space

The socio-economic transformation of this area from a rural to an urban landscape has brought about a shift in the social landscape as well. This change, though fuelled by the IT sector, is associated with both the real estate/construction businesses and the migration of people into this area. This area now reveals a huge spectrum of classes from the really poor to the rich, as suggested earlier in the chapter. What has changed in the past decade, however, is that while a few years ago the differences in incomes would have shown a close correspondence to the hierarchy of caste, the rich of today are not necessarily the so-called upper castes, nor are the poor necessarily from the so-called lower castes.

Yet, as noted earlier, until recently it was caste that determined the spatial organisation of these villages,[50] which were traditionally divided into three sectors – the Village (where Backward Castes, Most Backward Castes and Other Castes lived), the Colony (where Scheduled Castes lived) and the Tribal settlements.

Specifically, in one of the villages that constitutes Panchagrami, on one side of the highway was the Village (inhabited by Backward Castes and Other Castes); on the other was where the Colony (inhabited by the Scheduled Castes) was established, with its own burial ground. This is an established structure in village India, where people do not cross ritual

boundaries of purity and pollution. While such practices prevailed up to the turn of the last century, they have now almost disappeared, due to the development of the IT industry and the real estate boom. Over the last five to eight years several new commercial centres and residential complexes have been created in the space formerly referred to as the Colony. Adjacent to the Colony were agricultural lands and mango groves; the land was acquired and reworked for bigger apartment complexes. The original inhabitants of the Colony have sold their houses, sometimes along with small land holdings, to these most recent settlers and builders.

At least 17 residential buildings (each containing between 170 and 800 housing units/apartments) are under construction on both sides of the highway. A further 25 huge apartment complexes already exist in Panchagrami. Property builders include well-known Indian builders. A two-bedroom apartment could cost a minimum of 3.5 million Indian rupees, and range up to 9 million Indian rupees.[51] A five-bedroom apartment from a reputed builder and including a scenic view could cost around 50 million Indian rupees, while independent villas cost anything between 6.5 million rupees to 70 million Indian rupees.

Though there has been development on the village side too, the Colony, situated right next to a canal (or at least its backwaters), had more economic value, as it guaranteed the residents of the high-rise apartments a scenic view. Former inhabitants of the Colony used their newly acquired financial power to move across or down the road. Previously dispersed castes have moved in together and the earlier demarcation of space has vanished. The Colony has been obliterated. The so-called lower castes, including those previously considered ritually impure and thus once excluded, now live in close proximity to the so-called upper castes.

The presence of a cemetery in the midst of an elaborate, multi-storey apartment complex in Panchagrami further helps to elucidate this merger of modern and traditional spaces. This multi-storeyed apartment complex houses blocks of apartments with starting prices ranging from around 17 million rupees to around 50 million rupees. It is close to the backwaters, offering a scenic view, and was built a few years ago. However, since it was built on lands belonging to the Scheduled Castes, it also houses a cremation ground for the Scheduled Castes, situated right in front of one of the blocks. Attempts to move it by the construction company when the apartment complex was being built have failed.

The residents now occupying the apartment dislike this cremation area, which they feel spoils the landscape and offends their sensibilities. One of the residents (in his late sixties) mentioned that it

reminds him of his own mortality. However, the area has been used for this purpose by locals who have been living here for a very long time. Given the predominance of money and the pressure from the apartment owners and residents (who generally belong to the so-called higher castes) a ‘solution’ seems imminent, and the cremation grounds are likely to be re-positioned to the other side of the road. In effect what would once have been largely a caste-based struggle over the relative position of settlements and activities has now become a conflict of both class and caste.

The only exception to this merging of spaces has been that of areas used by the Irula tribes. They still live in settlements specifically designated for them, and their position remains largely unaltered.

There might be a temptation to conclude at this point that class is now becoming paramount over caste-based divisions. Yet when we turn to the local political divisions, we find that caste still plays a significant role.

Politics and governance

The two biggest parties in Tamil Nadu are the DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam)[52] and the AIADMK (Anna Dravida Munnetera Kazhagam).[53] These parties are found throughout the state, including Panchagrami, and are vehemently opposed to each other at the state level. They boast immense power in the state and are pretty diversified with respect to caste and gender. Other than these major parties, parties such as the MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam),[54] DMDK (Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam),[55] VCK (Viduthalai Chiruthigal Katchi)[56] and the PMK (Pattali Makkal Katchi)[57] also have large numbers of followers. One must note that VCK and PMK are caste-based political parties. VCK is a Dalit- (Scheduled Caste-)based political party and PMK is a Vanniyar- (Most Backward Class-)based political party. A couple of these villages have a significant proportion of Dalit inhabitants, while others have a significant proportion of people from the Most Backward caste category. Given that this site is under transformation, it must be noted that the area’s diversity has definitely increased, but you can still find caste-based political party support here. Although people are loyal to the parties they support, the violence that might accompany political struggle at the state or national level did not seem to affect this area. Similarly, though Panchagrami has a diverse religious population, opposition during religious festivals from other religions seems never

to arise. One reason may be the absence of any religion-based political groups here.

A couple of villages that form Panchagrami come under the affirmative action plan policies[58] of the government of Tamil Nadu. The office of the panchayat president can thus only be occupied by the members of the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes, and as a result people here sometimes prefer to contest elections as independent candidates, even if openly supporting a political party. For instance, one of the panchayat boards here has a president who belongs to the Scheduled Caste and the AIADMK; he stood as an independent candidate for this Scheduled Caste-based reserved position.

Having introduced Panchagrami and its people we now move onto the next section, which details the research framework and the methodology used in this project.

The project framework

This book is the result of a 15-month online and offline ethnographic study of Panchagrami. Ethnography[59] as a research methodology encompasses methods such as participant observation, interviews, surveys and so forth. All of this was performed offline as well as online[60] (the latter involving friending people on Facebook, becoming members of various WhatsApp groups, following several on Twitter, connecting with professionals on LinkedIn and observing their online activity over this period). This process required living with the people of Panchagrami, meeting them every single day for 15 months and participating in their daily lives. Meeting people many times and having both formal interviews and informal conversations with them were thus part of the process. Over 100 formal interviews and innumerable informal and casual conversations were conducted to get a deeper understanding of the people and their usage of social media.

Conducting ethnography at Panchagrami was not easy. The main challenge was to build trust and gain access to peoples' inner circles, so that they would give access to personal social media interactions. This required experimentation, imaginative thinking and a lot of patience. For the first three months, owing to a portion of Panchagrami being very traditional, it was challenging to recruit young women in particular as research participants. Style of dress and how I projected myself mattered a lot. On the one hand, wearing a T-shirt and jeans aroused doubts about the genuineness of the research; on the other, formal clothing led

to my being perceived as a salesman. In the end it was only by wearing traditional items of clothing such as kurtas, seemingly the garb of an 'Indian intellectual', that I cemented my position as an academic, to whom women thought it was safe to speak.

Over the period of 15 months, the number of Facebook respondents who agreed to be friended for research purposes was 172. While 132 were friended on a research profile specifically created for the purpose of online ethnography, 40 more were friended on my original Facebook profile, as they did not wish to be friended on the research profile. Further, around 53 personal contacts were established on WhatsApp; this number kept increasing over the period of field work and even afterwards, eventually reaching around 210. A similar situation arose with the WhatsApp groups. 41 informants were followed on Twitter and 67 connections were established on a separate LinkedIn profile; once again this number continued to grow even after the end of the field work.

Two project questionnaires were undertaken,[61] namely Questionnaire 1 (Q1) and Questionnaire 2 (Q2). Both were administered to people who were on social media. Q1 was administered to around 130 people at the beginning of the field work, and Q2 to 150 people at the end of the field work. Other than these two project questionnaires, which were administered uniformly across the nine sites of the larger project,[62] three other smaller surveys were administered at Panchagrami in order to help understand certain aspects of the society in more detail. The field work also used social media interactions (such as data mined from Facebook and WhatsApp), communication diaries, communication maps, relationship circles, browsing history files and archival research to understand the impact of social media in this area better.

Signed ethics and consent forms guaranteeing anonymity were obtained from all those who agreed to be interviewed as research participants.

Conclusion

To anyone unfamiliar with the study of Indian society, some of the details provided in this chapter may seem somewhat daunting. What is a caste and how does it relate to class? How do the government's categorisations of people fit with the ones they use to describe themselves? It would be hard enough to gain a clear understanding of all of this in a static situation. But the context for this ethnography is anything but static. What happens when, simply because of changes in

real-estate values, some local villagers who have remained in most respects much as before find themselves with assets and incomes comparable to the employees of the IT sector that caused this upsurge in property values? How do they now relate to other inhabitants who did not benefit? The penultimate chapter addresses issues that parallel this point. What happens to an education system that everyone now perceives as geared towards something called a 'knowledge economy', as it seeks to embrace the requirements of both the villagers' children and those of IT professionals?

Fortunately by looking at this context as a whole we can see two complementary properties of these changes. Clearly there are all sorts of divisions and differences that must be taken into account throughout. One of the most significant is that of gender, which cuts across many of the others; another is the differentiation between a family's internal dynamics and the way in which it faces outwards. But the larger point is that these differences are mainly traditional divisions, with categories such as caste going back thousands of years. So in a way this also expresses what all these groups have in common – all are regulated by caste differences, gender differences and the rules of family life. As noted at the start of this chapter, that is really the story of this book; how a society that appears to be characterised by differences is actually showing continuity with the long-term traditions that lie behind them.

Only by bearing these points in mind can we embark on the way this narrative is expressed by and through social media. For this book, as with others in the same series, is not dominated by evidence of how social media has transformed society, but rather the exact opposite: how social media has itself been transformed by its adoption in this context. We can only come to appreciate what social media is in South India when we recognise that within a few years social media has become a powerful expression of a much older and wider story of Tamil society itself.

2
The social media landscape: people, their perception and presence on social media

> 'Chennai has one of the largest user bases of social media in India…we have contributed to India being one of the top countries in adoption of new technologies.'
>
> Venugopal, a digital media analyst

With the IT sector thriving in Panchagrami and the nearby city of Chennai ranking fifth in Indian cities in terms of the number of Facebook users,[1] it would not be surprising to see Panchagrami in the vanguard of technological development. Communication technologies arrived at Panchagrami less as a step-by-step process of gradual evolution, and more in a series of rapid leaps,[2] the latest of which is the advent of social media.[3] In order to understand the social media landscape in Panchagrami more clearly, it is best to begin with a brief discussion of the history of communication in this area.

Traditional communication within Panchagrami always involved meeting people face to face,[4] be it to discuss everyday matters or those involving important life events such as birth, marriage or even death. Both the nature of the message and the social status of the receiver determined who conveyed it,[5] as well as the degree of formality required in delivering such messages. For example, if a housewife cooking breakfast for the family discovered that she lacked an essential spice for a dish, it was acceptable for her to send one of the children to her neighbour's house to borrow the required ingredient. However, if a family wanted to invite their neighbours to an event the family were hosting, convention dictated that the adults visited their neighbours in person to extend the invitation. In addition, news related to deaths,

temple festivals, announcements from the local governing village council (panchayat) or policies concerning the community were only conveyed through male messengers appointed for the specific tasks.[6]

Alongside such channels of communication, gossip[7] also helped in the rapid spread of social news in this tightknit rural community. Squabbles within family, matters of romance, the dowry charged by a groom's family and similar concerns were passed along as gossip. Such information was always transmitted by word of mouth, and the carriers were as diverse as the items of gossip themselves. Murthy, a 27-year-old entrepreneur, remembers an event that occurred almost 15 years ago. His distant great-aunt, who lived in a neighbouring village, had once come to the house confronting them with the news of his uncle's engagement; she demanded to know why she had not been informed of this development. This surprised Murthy's family, since the topic of his uncle's marriage and the need to look out for prospective brides had only been casually discussed the previous evening. They soon discovered that the maid who helped in their house had met with someone from his great-aunt's village at the market and had mentioned this discussion, though there was no actual engagement. This then found its way to his great-aunt, but with enough spice added to it to make her feel slighted.

One heard of numerous such stories in this area. Though men blamed women for spreading gossip, both sexes were equally involved in the practice. While women met with each other in the alleys between their homes to exchange news about interpersonal and family issues, men tended to meet at local tea stalls or in other public spaces. Here they chatted about the latest business deals that other men in the area had struck, or about political matters, at both local and state level. Younger men often gossiped about the young women in the area, or about the latest films and their stars, while younger women chatted about fashion, cinema, domestic issues and the area's young men. Though women of the household always updated the men on important pieces of interpersonal or family gossip, the reverse generally did not take place.

People who migrated from Panchagrami stayed in touch with their relatives through stamped post cards or inland letters. A post office in this area not only functioned as a clearing house for letters, but also as a communal space where the locals met.[8] Telegrams or 'Thandhi'[9] were used to convey urgent messages. However, people were generally anxious about receiving a sudden telegram, as they immediately assumed that it brought the news of the death of someone they knew. This service thus quickly came to be associated with inauspiciousness. Such an

association for telegrams was not unique to Panchagrami; it was the case with several other Indian villages as well. In July 2013 the Indian Telegraphic Service closed down after 162 years of service,[10] thereby bringing this channel of communication to an end. Local, national and international courier services appeared on the scene only in the early part of the twenty-first century; they now cater to several sections of the local populace as well as to the IT sector as a means of communicating urgent and important news.

Radio, television (TV), newspapers and magazines[11] traditionally conveyed international, national and regional news, along with trivia and gossip about famous personalities such as cinema stars, sportspeople, politicians and other regional celebrities. While the government-run 'Akasha Vani' radio channel was the only radio channel until the late 1990s, private Tamil radio channels such as Suryan FM, Radio Mirchi and Big FM[12] gained immense popularity in Panchagrami in the 2000s. Possession of radio sets of varied sizes, and listening to radio through mobile phones, has increased the popularity of these radio channels for entertainment and local news.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, several families in Panchagrami did not own a television. They almost always assembled in the local panchayat offices to view news and the weekly Friday 'Oliyum Oliyum', a half-hour programme featuring Tamil film songs. The latter part of the 1990s and early 2000s saw more families buying television sets. Also with both the leading political parties in Tamil Nadu vying with each other to include television sets as a part of their election freebies[13] to the lower socio-economic classes, almost all homes in Panchagrami now own a set. Television channels also increased in the latter part of 1990s and the 2000s, moving from the sole, government-run Doordharshan channel that existed in the late 1980s and early 1990s to cable and private network channels such as Sun TV, Vijay TV, Jaya TV[14] and a host of other Tamil, English and other Indian language channels. While most pay for their own cable connection, there are cases where such connections are illegally clustered and borrowed from one single connection. As mentioned in Chapters 1 and 3, cinema is very popular in this area as it is in the rest of Tamil Nadu, and all the above channels feature programmes dedicated to film-related news.

While Tamil newspapers such as *Dhina Thanthi* or *Dhina Malar*[15] are a common sight in the local tea stalls, English-language dailies such as *The Hindu*, *The New Indian Express*, *Deccan Chronicle*, *The Times of India* and *The Economic Times*[16] find their middle- and upper middle-class readership through both print and online versions. Similarly

weekly Tamil magazines such as *Kumudam* and *Ananda Vikatan*[17] are a common sight in both middle class and lower socio-economic class households, while English magazines such as *India Today*, *Business Today*, *Femina* and *Vogue*[18] appear in upper middle-class households. Tech magazines such as *Dataquest* and *Digit*[19] are also visible in the homes of middle-class IT employees. Telugu, Hindi and Malayalam newspapers and magazines are also read by IT workers and their families, and by the low-wage migrant workers from other states.

The mobile phone, internet and Orkut

Following telegraph and postal services, the next in line for communicating personal news was the landline phone. Though the local governing council owned one in 1970s, the high demand–supply ratio of such phones and the resultant bureaucracy in their allocation[20] ensured that personal ownership of a landline was concentrated among a few influential families at Panchagrami as late as the 1990s; use of the phone was shared with their neighbours, extended kin or caste members.[21] Telephone numbers were exchanged with relatives living far afield, as well as with locals who had migrated from the village, to enable them to contact relatives in times of emergency.

This was followed by the development of the public telephone system called the 'STD/ISD booths', which allowed people to place local, national or international calls for an associated fee.[22] Though mobile phones were introduced in India in 1995,[23] only around the beginning of the new millennium did people in this area equip themselves with them. Various factors, such as a rise in the number of phone manufacturers, choices of telecom providers and low prices contributed to the rapid spread of mobile phones, especially non-smartphones.[24] These mobile phones very soon became an affordable item, radically changing the channels and processes of communication in this area.

Parallel to the growth of mobile telecommunications in this area, the influx of information technology companies at Panchagrami also stimulated a general interest in acquiring a computer. This interest coincided with the increased affluence of a section of the traditional population who had made lucrative real estate deals. One common use of these new funds was to buy computers[25] for the younger members of the family. Ownership of a computer by a younger member of the family was to a certain extent seen as an intergenerational attainment[26] by the local residents. However, in practice these computers

were used by the children of long-term residents more for purposes of gaming, watching films and listening to music rather than for formal education.

During this period, most skilled IT workers were still commuting from the city of Chennai by private, company-owned or public transport to work for the emerging IT industry; housing in the form of multi-storeyed apartment complexes closer to their offices was still in the process of development. So, although IT employees may well have owned personal computers, mostly desktops, they were at this stage mostly residents of Chennai, not of Panchagrami. However, in the latter part of the 2000s and the early 2010s, ownership of both desktops and laptops rose in this area, coinciding with the rise in the number of skilled IT workers and their families relocating to Panchagrami to work.[27] It was also during this period that computers (both desktops and laptops) were becoming more affordable, and with the government's scheme promoting one laptop per child, the influx of computers into families with children at high school was rapid. There were cases where these laptops were either shared within extended families or were sometimes even sold on at a price lower than the market price. Nevertheless, computers remain a faraway dream for the lower socio-economic classes who do not have children in high schools or cannot afford to buy personal computers.

Access to the internet in the early years of the millennium was patchy, as it was still the 'dial up' era and required landline phones to connect to the internet. Since a majority of Panchagrami's inhabitants did not possess a landline phone, their personal computers (for those who owned them) were not connected to the internet. Access to the internet in this area was only through a browsing centre/cyber café,[28] which seems to have always been crowded with male college students or IT workers. Apart from general browsing, other popular uses of the internet in the browsing centres included online gaming, checking emails, viewing pornography and chatting through Yahoo and ICQ chat rooms.

Orkut, owned by Google, was one of the first social media platforms to be available in India.[29] While it is now closed, as the rest of the world has moved on to similar social media platforms like Facebook and others, Orkut was initially a very popular avenue for online friending in India. It scaled up in the mid-2000s and a large proportion of traffic to the site was generated from India.[30] Though people appear to have viewed Yahoo groups and email groups as predecessors to Orkut, the former failed to have the same impact.

Vikram, a 34-year-old senior consultant who has worked with an information technology multinational in Panchagrami since it was first set up in the area in 2002, observed:

> By late 2005, we were all into Orkut. It was fun. We used to discuss it in the office all the time. I wasn't married at that time and stayed with a group of IT friends. After reaching Chennai ... you know how this area was, bad roads and all, it took almost an hour to reach Chennai ... I used to get to a browsing centre and was on Orkut until late in the evening. Saturdays ... Sundays ... Orkut was the world for us.

Sujatha, a 29-year-old homemaker who now lives in Panchagrami, noted:

> Orkut at that time was the cool thing in my college. It was cool to be on Orkut, but it wasn't like if you weren't on Orkut you did not belong to the group. Several of my friends weren't on Orkut. They were from villages outside Chennai ... there was always this Peeping Tom mentality on Orkut ... even now people do that on Facebook, but with Orkut you knew who visited your profile ... it was fun to start with, but became very irritating after some time.

Arjun, a 31-year-old Non-Resident Indian,[31] owns an apartment in Panchagrami. He moved to the US after completing his Bachelors' degree in computer engineering from Chennai to pursue his Masters degree there. He commented:

> Earlier, it was only through Orkut that I could stay in touch with several of my Indian classmates. Now you have several other means, but in 2005 it seemed like the only medium after email ... Orkut was definitely more fun than emailing.

However, their use of Orkut seems to have faded away in the early 2010s.[32] None of those quoted above had cancelled their accounts; they had simply forgotten their account details when they moved onto other media such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Memories of using Orkut were common among those who had recently migrated from the cities to settle at Panchagrami.

Unlike recent middle-class and upper middle-class migrants to Panchagrami from other cities, who remember Orkut with fondness, the service was not popular with the locals of Panchagrami. Only a few of the

long-term residents of Panchagrami had even used the platform, as Siva, a 37-year-old entrepreneur dabbling in the transport business, puts it:

> That was the time when development in this area had just started flowing in full force . . . in my generation, you didn't have too many people who were educated. Further, not many had an internet connection. I think several in my generation missed out on Orkut but found Facebook. Internet cafés were popular, but it was all inside Chennai. We just had one café at that time. Did you know these students from other cities who came to study in these engineering colleges . . . they would always be in the café, they were the ones who accessed Orkut, not us. I was on it only because one of my friends from Chennai told me about it.

Sundar, a 32-year-old resident of Panchagrami, explained:

> I was on Orkut, when one of my friends introduced me to it in my college . . . it was in the city . . . not here . . . none of my area friends were on it . . . I told my friends about it . . . they were initially interested but then lost interest as they did not have computers to access it. All my Orkut connections were my friends from the city. Now . . . with Facebook it's all different . . . you can access it on mobiles . . . ten years ago . . . this wasn't the case. You needed to go to the cafés to access it. There was a friend of mine who stayed on it for some time but lost interest . . . now he is on Facebook . . . why speak of Orkut when several here did not even have an email account?

Access to social media through personal devices had to wait until the internet infrastructure evolved and broadband became popular and affordable. The early adopters of broadband and Wi-Fi were the middle-class and upper middle-class families in Panchagrami. Access to the internet through USB dongles also started gaining ground with the influx of laptops. Use of such dongles is evident among the IT professionals and college students who live in hostels, and the local lower middle classes who are unable to afford a broadband connection at home.

Parallel to the arrival of broadband and internet through USB dongles came the influx of the cheap, Chinese-made, local and branded (for example, Samsung) smartphones manufactured specifically for the Indian market.[33] This was closely followed by the rise of affordable data plans, thus allowing lower income groups also to connect to

the internet.[34] These cheap smartphones were pared-down versions of average smartphones, with reduced technical capabilities. Such phones transformed the communication set-up in India,[35] and had a significant effect on Panchagrami for its part. While the national average for smartphone[36] penetration in 2014 was around 21 per cent[37], at Panchagrami observational analysis and a sample survey suggests a penetration of 48 per cent among the residents;[38] the presence of smartphones among the floating population of skilled IT workers[39] might well be higher, possibly reaching as high as 70 per cent. However, the kind of smartphones that people possessed varied in brand, technical capabilities and prices. High-end smartphones were mostly owned by the upper middle-class IT workers and their families or well-to-do long-term residents. However there were also instances of young men in their early twenties from lower socio-economic classes who owned such costly smartphones as well. They bought them by borrowing money from their social circles and through instalment schemes offered by the phone retailers.[40] For these customers a phone's size and functionality were status symbols among their peers.

Interviews with mobile phone outlets at Panchagrami revealed that the most popular smartphones were the entry-level phones in the price range of Rs. 3,000/– to Rs. 5,000/–.[41] Samsung's mobile phone models for the Indian market seemed to be the most popular choice for several consumers opting for this price range. Consumers of high-end mobile phones, such as iPhones, HTC, Sony and the more expensive Samsung product lines in Panchagrami, preferred to purchase such phones from branded outlets inside Chennai rather than from the local shops at Panchagrami. This was due to the wider range of options of phone models, payment schemes and after sales services such outlets could offer.

Smartphones here, as elsewhere, are used for a wide variety of services ranging from calling and texting to gaming, accessing emails and social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and WhatsApp, to snapping and uploading pictures or even watching films. While gaming on smartphones had become merely an attractive 'time pass'[42] for those in their late twenties and thirties, it was an important aspect of several teenagers' lives. In fact several children at Panchagrami had first become members of Facebook specifically for gaming, and they used smartphones, computers and tablets[43] for this purpose.[44]

A few from lower income groups possessed laptops (provided for free by the government of Tamil Nadu under the 'one laptop per child' scheme),[45] which they tethered[46] to a pre-paid mobile internet connection obtained through their cheap smartphones. This acted as a channel

for accessing newer television programmes on YouTube and watching several new pirated Tamil movies.[47] In short it was their television, and to a certain extent a cinema in itself, providing affordable entertainment. The same thing occurred with the middle classes as well, only this time they used either broadband or USB dongle to access these services over their branded laptops or assembled desktops.[48] With the current ruling party announcing freebies such as mobile phones, laptops and free Wi-Fi connection[49] in public places, there are expectations of a steep rise in both internet and social media usage in the near future.

Choice between voice and social media

The presence of smartphones did not necessarily mean that all communication was routed only through social media. In fact several social factors determined communication systems in Panchagrami. For example, communication with the elderly members of a family mostly takes place through voice. This could be due to comfort with a more traditional media, parental control and disapproval of the use of other media by younger people. Sometimes factors such as literacy, absence of knowledge of a specific language such as English or even lack of interest or confidence in learning newer skills also play a role in channelling communication through voice.

This is evident in the case of Ravi's mother, whose limitations force Ravi to call her over the phone even for routine everyday communication.[50]

Ravi, aged 25, belongs to a lower middle class family and works as a data entry operator in a medical information processing company in Panchagrami. His younger sister is married and lives in Chennai. His father, a farmer, also works as a plumber to supplement his income, and his mother is a homemaker. Though all the family members now have personal mobile phones, his sister acquired one only after she got married; until then she used her mother's phone. Ravi's parents own non-smart Micromax phones, while Ravi owns a Samsung Galaxy core smartphone.

On workdays Ravi generally packs his lunch from home. If this gets delayed, he calls his mother around mid-morning from his office to check if he can drop in at home for lunch. This would just involve a brief chat for around two minutes, with the conversation only extending if she wants him to run an errand. Their understanding is that if he does not call her, she will not prepare lunch for him. On one occasion

his busy schedule at the office meant that Ravi was unable to call his mother; instead, he just sent her a SMS[51] to let her know of his arrival for lunch that day. When he went home, he was surprised to find that she had not prepared anything for lunch, and she startled him further by stating that he had not informed her of his arrival. To prove otherwise, he seized her mobile phone to show his message. That was when Ravi discovered that his mother never read any messages. She did not know how to read them, especially if they were in English. Ravi was particularly surprised since on an earlier occasion he had received a response from his mother's phone to an English text of his. He subsequently discovered that it was his sister who had messaged him from his mother's phone.

Ravi now makes a point of calling his mother, recognising that the only way to communicate with her is by speaking directly. He says that she was not interested in learning how to message, even in Tamil. Now the pair seems to have worked out a way to communicate even when Ravi is busy at work and cannot talk to her. He gives her a missed call;[52] if the phone rings twice, the message is that he will be at home for lunch; if he doesn't call, it means he will not be there. Ravi feels that for his mother a mobile phone has simply replaced a landline; she uses it to make calls and for nothing else.

Ravi calls his father very rarely, and never during work hours, since his father might be busy working either in the field or on plumbing jobs. However, his father can read text messages, so Ravi messages his father in Tamil or in an Anglicised script of Tamil. The texts are mostly very short ones, usually meant to pass on information. For example, one of his messages to his father was '*Arisi vangiyachi*' which means 'I have bought rice' – letting his father know so that he does not buy it as well. His father rarely replies, but Ravi knows that he reads his messages. He also knows that if he tells his mother whatever information needs to be conveyed, it will be passed on to the entire family. He jokingly refers to his mother as the 'telephone exchange'.

Though Ravi tends to restrict conversations with his sister when he is at work (calling her over the phone only during the weekends or after work), he does message her occasionally. Most messages to his sister are forwards and jokes (though he makes certain that he does not send her any 'adult' ones). His sister calls their mother several times a day to chat; she also rings their father at least once a day. Generally chats with the entire family take place only at weekends. Ravi says that his parents insist on hearing his sister's voice at least once a day.

The case of Ravi's mother very clearly illustrates the choice of voice over text functions due to issues with literacy and technical skills. Emotional concerns may also arise, especially in the relationship between parents and daughters.

Consider the case of Shobana, a 22-year-old college student in her final year of study. She owns a Nokia smartphone, a birthday present from her uncle, and a non-smart Nokia feature phone. While her smartphone is meant for social media activities and chats with her friends, Shobana uses her feature phone exclusively for her family; she does not give this number to her friends. This exclusivity in channels of communication only began after an incident involving her parents when she returned home late from college. Shobana says that she messaged her mother letting her know that she would be late, immediately after which her mother called her a couple of times; she received no response, which seems to have irked and worried her. From her mother's perspective, all she needed to know was that Shobana was safe, and hence answering her call in such situations should be mandatory.

Shobana, an only child, is aware that her safety is the highest priority for her family. She feels that her mother had become more anxious with news of various rapes[53] and murders happening in the country. Here lies the reason why Shobana does not use the same phone for her friends and family. Her mother and, to a certain extent, her father get irritated when their calls do not immediately get answered; as Shobana's mother says, her daughter tends to talk to her friends for hours on end, and calling her does not get any response. Hence, the need for an exclusive phone line for her parents. Her feature phone doesn't have any data (internet) pack added to it, while her smartphone has a 3G internet data pack. Her parents communicate through SMS at other times, but when it comes to Shobana they seem very specific that communication should be by voice.

Even in upper middle-class families, which had social media savvy elders, their hierarchy within family circles and expectations of respect influenced the choice of platform for intergenerational communication. They considered the use of new media for certain communication to be impersonal and disrespectful. Expectations from family elders in this direction are clearly elucidated in the case of Raghavan, a 65-year-old retired head of training and development of a major pharmaceutical company. He much prefers people to call him to inform him about life events, rather than just sending a message on social media. He even considers an email announcing certain life events as impersonal and disrespectful to elders.

We see here both a preference for voice and for synchronous communication rather than asynchronous communication.[54] So sending voice messages over WhatsApp to them does not appeal as much as having a phone conversation or Skype/Google Hangout conversations for those living far away. However, this perspective slightly shifts when communicating with immediate family members who have migrated to a foreign land for work or education. Chapter 4, which examines family relationships, discusses this aspect in much more detail, and extends it to other forms of kinship as well.

Nevertheless, when we move from the use of communication platforms by the elderly or parents, we encounter a wider world that is now populated by social media. The first social media survey Q1, as discussed in Chapter 1, was conducted in 2013 when the field work began, on a sample of 130 respondents, all of whom were users of social media.[55] The results showed that Facebook was the most popular social networking site (84 per cent), followed by WhatsApp (62 per cent) and Twitter (34 per cent) for this sample of social media users. Though sites such as LinkedIn (31 per cent) did appear in the survey, it was specific to the IT population and people who were working in other corporate sectors. Over the course of the field work there was continued evidence of this general trend of platform popularity among the residents of Panchagrami who used social media. An exception might be that of WhatsApp, as it seemed likely that during field work its popularity might have even overtaken that of Facebook.[56]

Very few people had accounts on Instagram, and while BBM was popular among upper-middle-class corporate employees who still hung onto their Blackberry phones, Snapchat or Instagram did not feature to any significant extent.[57] People were members of multiple platforms at the same time, for example people on Facebook were also on Twitter or WhatsApp, and the reverse was also evident.

Among the users of social media who were surveyed through Q1, 83 per cent[58] suggested that they accessed social media platforms through smartphones, though the range of smartphone brands and the associated data plans varied widely as suggested earlier. The other popular channels for accessing social media were laptops (61 per cent) and desktops (47 per cent). While most used broadband or USB dongles, there were cases of people who tethered their phones for internet access. The following sections of this chapter provide an introduction to the presence of three important social media platforms, namely Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter, as they appeared at Panchagrami. LinkedIn was used more by the IT sector as both a professional networking tool as

well as a knowledge resource. LinkedIn groups helped users to develop professional contacts for furthering career prospects, while at the same time providing news on current developments in their respective tech domains and articles on leadership and personal or professional development. Within the IT sector, LinkedIn is seen as both a knowledge network and a network to increase opportunities in users' professional lives.

Facebook: class, caste and gender

Though Facebook finds a presence among both the IT employees who have settled with their families at Panchagrami and the long-term residents of this area, social factors such as class, caste, age and gender have an impact on the use of Facebook within these groups. Examining their influence will help us to understand how Facebook fits into Panchagrami in general.

Among the lower middle classes and lower-income groups at Panchagrami, it is the younger people who are predominantly on Facebook. This group, mainly comprising literate men, have some form of employment, be it as a driver, a housekeeper or even as an entry-level IT support worker. They generally access Facebook through smartphones with a pre-paid internet connection. Most of the female friends on their friends lists are from other areas or even from other Indian states, since young single women in this area and from these strata were restricted from using phones, a restriction that consequently extends to accessing Facebook as well. The men belonging to certain caste groups in these strata perceive Facebook as a dangerous influence for women in their families. Such a perception of Facebook comes from their use of the platform as a tool to flirt, the fear of inter-caste romances, their communities' perception of cross-gender friendship and the fear of losing family honour within their community if others become aware that a girl has been exposed to such friendships.[59] The men acknowledge that several women from their respective communities in this area might be on Facebook, but they would generally discourage them if they discovered their existence on the platform, since they routinely search for young women from their communities on Facebook.

The main impact of caste on Facebook is therefore essentially in regard to gender issues. For example, the leadership of a caste-based political group (this caste claims to be higher up the social hierarchy than the Scheduled Castes) had recently declared that the girls of their caste were being targeted and wooed by young men from the Scheduled

Castes, and that this had to be stopped as it was leading to inter-caste marriages. The young men from this caste group, who more or less fell into lower middle-class backgrounds, expressed a similar opinion, echoing the thoughts of their leader. This led to even tighter restrictions on the younger women in their families, who were barred from using mobile phones and having access to Facebook. All of this was justified by the claim that they needed to be protected from young men of the Scheduled Castes; through such restrictions the risk that young women would be attracted to and marry males of these castes, which would be viewed as pollution,[60] could be avoided.

Interviews with young women belonging to this class and caste revealed that in reality most of them had an account on Facebook, since they did not want to be left out of a social network that their peers from the city enjoyed. However, the use of this account was not as constant or active as they wanted it to be. They normally accessed it from college through phones that their classmates from Chennai or from less conservative backgrounds brought along with them.[61] This was also true of several other caste groups in these economic strata, which normally had stricter controls over women accessing social media.[62] The kind of controls ranged from a complete ban on accessing social media to controlling the time and space of such access. For example Manjula, a 20-year-old college student from the lower middle class, and comparatively a less strict family, was allowed access to social media through their family desktop only until 8 pm every evening.

While Manjula's restriction was based on time of access, there is an underlying restriction based on space of access as well. For example Archana, aged 20, studies in a college at Panchagrami and has a smartphone, which is barred for use outside the home. This is yet another idea of using a phone and social media at home vs. outside home – most families allow younger female members to access phones and social media from home because they are in a safe environment, and contact can be conducted under the watchful eyes of other family members. The idea that the domestic sphere or the home space is secure for women while the space outside home is dangerous and masculine[63] came up several times in conversations with people of these communities. Archana prefers using her friend's mobile phone (her friend belongs to the same caste group, but comes from a less conservative family and lives in Chennai) to access Facebook while in college. She continues to access Facebook on her own phone once she is back home.

The restrictions for these young women are usually not imposed by their mothers, but by their brothers who were within approximately

three years of their age. They exercised tight control over their sisters, keeping a constant check to see if their sister was on Facebook and with whom was she communicating on the platform. It was normally a girl's friends at college or a cousin from the city who helped her to open a Facebook account. The profiles of these young women on Facebook in a way reflected the restrictions that these women faced; they would never post their own pictures, for example, and usually had images of actresses, landscape views, babies or female cartoon characters. In addition, they also had fewer than 60 friends and most were either their extended kin network or female friends from their colleges.

Shilpa, a 21-year-old college student, has a Facebook profile, which only has her immediate and extended family members (brother, cousins, uncles and aunts) as her friends. She had turned down requests from several of her male classmates as her extended family on Facebook would not like it if she had male friends on her profile. The maximum leeway allowed to her was to friend her best friend Vasudha, a 21-year-old, who was both her neighbour and her classmate, and faced a similar situation. The case of K. Preethi, a 20-year-old computer science student, is similar; she had only five friends on Facebook, of which two were her uncle and her brother. These young women never revealed that they had Facebook profiles during their first interviews, as men were nearby. It was only during their subsequent interviews, when no other men were around, that they opened up about their Facebook presence.[64]

However, things were different for women who had no male siblings, many of whom had several of their male classmates as friends on Facebook. For girls growing up in a large family in which male cousins (approximately the same age as actual brothers would have been) were treated as brothers, the case reverted back to one of restrictions. In families that had a much greater age difference between a girl and her brother, restrictions tended to be looser. The same was true for families with only sisters. However, marriage or employment, whichever comes sooner in a woman's life, is treated as the rite of passage for owning a phone and having access to social media. Marriage is seen as the end of a major responsibility for a girl's family, while the financial benefits of employment bring with them a certain status for female employees. Even if actual restrictions on accessing Facebook no longer occur at these stages, a kind of soft control takes over, as most male kin members or married women from their community would start friending them now. The women thus have to ensure their posts on Facebook do not embarrass them in front of their community members. Naturally most married women in these groups resorted to posting socially relevant messages,

religious posts or pictures with their family, which were normative, and conforming to the expectations of the group on ideal Tamil womanhood.

However, when it came to upper-middle-class people[65] who had recently migrated to Panchagrami, restrictions were not very evident; most women from these classes seemed to be on either Facebook or other social media platforms. If they were not on these, it was of their own accord and not due to any strict restrictions. Their presence on social media was in a way influenced by their offline social networks as well; these women's friends were all on some kind of social media and so such memberships were automatically warranted. Though some parents suggested that they had cautioned their daughters of dangers online when it came to posting personal pictures or friending strangers, the latter's access was not limited in terms of time or space.

However, several young women had their parents or other family members as friends on Facebook, bringing its own 'soft' control over what they post. For example Krithi, a 19-year-old college student who has both her parents and her extended family on Facebook, along with over 100 other college friends, noted that she only posts things that would not embarrass her family. This trend was also visible among married women belonging to these groups; they ensured that they only posted messages that would cause no embarrassment to their social networks, which also comprised their families. It was evident that the imposition of gender restrictions on accessing phones or other social media was due to a complex mix of several factors, among them caste, class, patriarchy, emotions etc. There were cases where people belonging to the same caste but different classes perceived social media differently. In these cases, therefore, seeking to pinpoint one specific factor might in itself be very restricting.

Meanwhile the men in Panchagrami, irrespective of their socio-economic status, became members of Facebook at a much younger age. Several young men in the middle classes had first accessed the platform between the ages of seven and ten, while for the lower-socio-economic classes the age of first use was around 12 or 13. Most young men of this age group access Facebook for playing games. Networking for them only happens over games, and their discussions are centered on games rather than anything else. A few young middle-class men in the age group of 14-15 have cousins (mostly staying abroad or in other Indian cities) as their friends on Facebook. While several middle-class teenagers alternate between their Playstation and Wii to games on Facebook, for others from a lower socio-economic background, Facebook more or less become their primary source for a world of games. From Figs 2.1

and 2.2, we can get a glimpse of the ages at which middle-class and wealthy boys and those from lower socio- economic backgrounds tend to get introduced to Facebook, along with the list of major influencers who introduced them to the platform (Figs 2.1 and 2.2).

At the age of 16 or 17, cinema, sports and an interest in the opposite sex take precedence, along with games on Facebook. However, as not many girls from lower socio-economic classes are on Facebook at the ages of 16 or 17, cross-gender friendship online for men in this stratum is more restricted. However, younger middle-class men of 16 or 17 do friend girls whom they know from their school or neighbourhood.

Things change when we observe college students. Men under the age of 22, who are still attending college, perceived Facebook primarily as a tool to woo girls, flirt[66] and, if possible, meet with them face to face. The female college students of this age group who were active on Facebook noted that they would generally friend their male classmates on the platform, since they met them every day and knew them well.

	Age	Use
Age of Access	7–10 years	Games
	12–13 years	Friending, Access of other aspects on FB

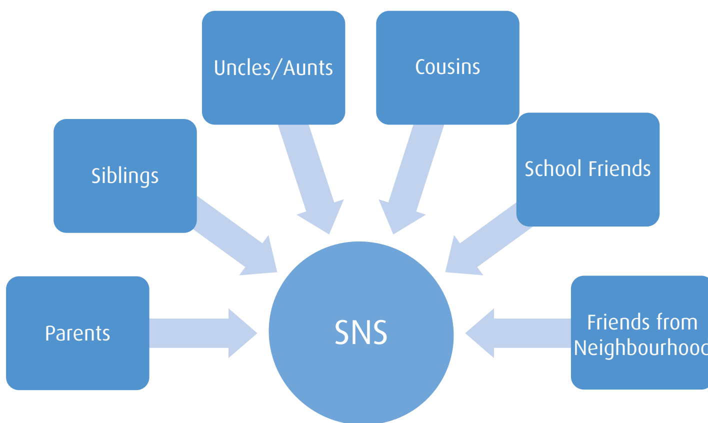


Fig. 2.1 Social networking sites – middle class

	Age	Use
Age of Access	12–13 years	Games
	14–15 years	Friending, Access of other aspects on FB

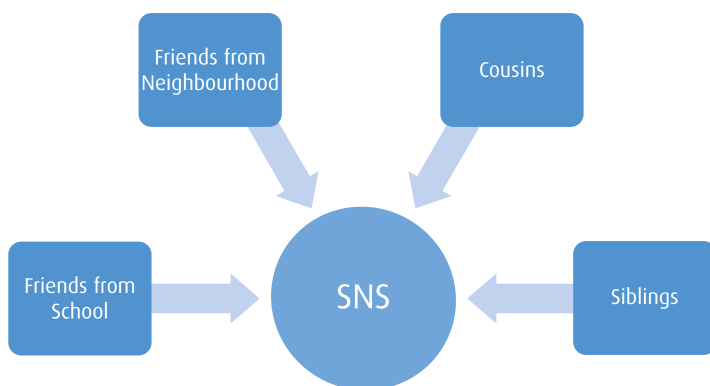


Fig. 2.2 Social networking sites – lower socio-economic class

Another common usage was to share video clips of Tamil cinema comedies, film songs, film news and political news.[67] Some used Facebook for developing specific interests such as bodybuilding, fashion, music, vegetarianism etc.

Mostly Facebook was perceived as a place for fun and socialising, which might include even sending messages of everyday greetings such as good morning or good evening, as discussed in Chapter 3.

There was clear evidence of competition among young men to accumulate maximal likes and comments for their posts, especially photographs, since they equated this to higher status among their peers. They usually uploaded a picture or a made a post, then called their friends over the phone and asked them to like it. They also canvassed their friends to like a post of theirs when they met them in person or while they chatted live on Facebook. Sometimes even personal text messages were sent asking friends to like their latest posts. This trend was also evident among female college students from this age group.

In Panchagrami, the users of Facebook in the age group of 22 to 25 years were mostly new graduates (some of whom were searching for jobs), postgraduates and new entrants into companies. Irrespective of gender and class, the new graduates used Facebook for serious purposes. Some subscribed to pages that post about employment opportunities, job-oriented skills and interview preparation tips. Others supported social issues and causes, joining groups that propagated or subscribed to their viewpoints. For this age group Facebook is a space for collective knowledge and information sharing.

Users between the ages of 25 and 40 in this area are not generally as active as their younger counterparts. Though they still access Facebook and maintain contacts, several become passive users, preferring to like and comment on the postings of others rather than post on their own profile. Even when they do post, most are forwards or links to news stories or articles. Irrespective of the gender or class, this age group was active on WhatsApp groups with a tighter social network. However, only the middle-class IT employees were active on work-related networks such as LinkedIn or even Twitter. While they are pretty careful and specific about how their profile on Facebook should look, these users did not generally seem to be too bothered about privacy settings. Many young married couples in this age group post pictures of their children (specifically young babies) publicly, not bothering with the privacy settings. Women belonging to upper middle-class families in this age group seemed more active on Facebook than their counterparts.

Users aged between 40 and 60 seem to be pretty clear that Facebook is for personal use only, while reserving LinkedIn for professional use. Segregation of media takes place based on how these people segregate their lives. They generally belonged to the middle class or upper middle classes, and were either entrepreneurs or skilled IT employees and their families. They actively try to get back in touch with their old college and school friends and relatives, and are careful and selective about their friends list. They are more worried about privacy settings on their Facebook profile as they consider this site very personal. While they set up groups, they maintain them as closed groups for various reasons. Mothers who post pictures of their children are usually pretty careful about privacy settings. However, there are also people in this group who friend everyone who sends them a request. They only unfriend people if they witness activities that they do not normally endorse, for example posting pornographic material, misogynistic posts etc. Anything that would undermine their reputation in the view of the public (their Facebook friend network) would be regarded seriously.

Users above the age of 60 years are mostly retired from formal work. They generally belong to the upper middle class or are rich. Interviews with elders aged above 60 revealed that their perspective of Facebook differed, with a range of sentiments being attached to it. Some seemed to have experimented with Facebook and then dropped out, not liking it much and associating it with immaturity; others seemed to have loved the platform and enjoyed experimenting with it. Some of the elderly female respondents post video recipes to daughters who are married and living abroad.[68] They also used Facebook to share and comment on pictures of their grandchildren or relatives living abroad or away from them. However, most expressed the view that Facebook has taken away the personal communication that Indian culture[69] once guaranteed.

The case of Mr Raghavan, whom we had met earlier in this chapter, can help illustrate this sentiment and the expectation about hierarchy in communication.

Mr Raghavan, aged 65, was on Facebook until very recently. He closed his account on it because he felt that younger users did not respect the elders as a consequence of Facebook's entry into India. A couple of incidents seemed to have particularly irked him. Firstly, his niece invited him to her son's first birthday party via Facebook and not in person over the phone, and secondly his nephew let him know of the birth of his son by posting a picture on Facebook, rather than calling him personally. In recounting these scenarios, Mr Raghavan stressed that in his view people should know how to communicate important life events to elders. He had the perspective that Facebook was becoming a mass media rather than a platform meant for personal communication. Conversely his wife felt that his expectations were unrealistic and that personal communication (generally through voice) could only be stressed upon and expected from the immediate family.

On the other hand Mr Karan, aged 66, declared that he is not averse to using Facebook as it could connect him to his nieces and nephews living abroad. He has created a Facebook page for the community that he lives in, as well as for an environmental project on saving a lake close to his home.

Thus, Facebook has helped some elderly users to give back to the community and to stay in touch with their children and other relatives living abroad. For others, however, it has removed the personal communication that they expected from family members.

Fake profiles or multiple profiles on Facebook do exist in Panchagrami. Users had fake profiles for multiple reasons, from forgetting their

earlier account information to keeping different social networks strategically apart, and even to reasons such as watching porn, wooing women and escaping social control. There were cases of Non-Resident Indians having double profiles to maintain relationships in a foreign land as well as in India.[70] A few anonymous gay profiles also exist on Facebook in Panchagrami in order to avoid ostracization and to maintain social conformity. Though Facebook as a company might deem such multiple profiles as being disintegrated and not conforming to their policy of having a single identity online, for some people at Panchagrami the fracturing of their personalities through multiple profiles is an authentic and necessary way of maintaining their identity.[71] Having established this general idea of Facebook's presence in Panchagrami, the chapter will now move on to discuss WhatsApp – a platform gaining popularity in Panchagrami following the influx of mobile phones and affordable internet plans.

WhatsApp

In early 2013 WhatsApp[72] at Panchagrami was relatively a less popular social media platform than Facebook.[73] In fact people considered it to be a natural extension to texting (one to one or to groups).[74] It was also clear that the WhatsApp presence was more of a conditional presence based on Facebook, i.e. people who said they had a WhatsApp account were almost always present on Facebook too. Only a very few people were on WhatsApp without also having a presence on Facebook. This was also a time when people were experimenting with WhatsApp as a viable platform for certain types of communication.[75]

However, by the later part of 2013 WhatsApp seemed to be rising in popularity, and was sometimes even independent of Facebook – i.e. people on WhatApp were not on Facebook.[76] The affordability of the mobile internet was one of the major reasons for the popularity of WhatsApp in this area. Prior to the later part of 2013 the buying pattern for prepaid internet mobile cards was Rs. 25/– for 200 MB of internet data, in comparison to phone texting booster packs for Rs. 15/– (enabling you to sometimes send up to 3,000 messages free of cost). Those from a lower economic stratum, given the limited social circle they could network with on the same platform, preferred texting packages to WhatsApp. Further, if one watched any streaming online content, for example a video on YouTube, this reduced their data balance drastically. This consumption pattern altered with the change in prices of internet packages; these

were made much more affordable, so that users could go online for an entire month with just a single top up of an affordable package such as 500 MB data for Rs. 20/-. You had to visit these mobile stores daily, as offers changed every day and cheap offers would be missed if you failed to update yourself. This was significant, since even deals on the internet were shared by word of mouth rather than through other channels, except when telecommunication companies marketed their latest offers through text messages.

With the increased affordability of internet packages, middle-class and upper-middle-class groups working in the IT sector were the earliest to embrace WhatsApp with a 3G connection. Thus affordability, coupled with functionalities such as text, visual and voice communication, plus the ability to scale communication from individuals to groups,[77] made WhatsApp an evident close second to Facebook, as it seemed more economically viable and decreased the cost of communicating with one's social circles in the long term.

This growth was not isolated, however, as it occurred at the same time that the smartphone market in India was taking shape. Such an expansion in the smartphone market also meant the rise of cheap and affordable smartphones. As seen in Chapter 1, the growth of India into one of WhatsApp's biggest user bases[78] was certainly connected to the parallel growth of the smartphone market.

For the residents of Panchagrami, WhatsApp fell between Facebook and texting on the phone. For them the platform offered the intimacy of personal, one-to-one communication while at the same time offering possibilities for communicating with groups that shared similar interests.[79] When it came to group communication, where users were a part of a bigger interest group, they perceived the others in the group as acquaintances and connections that shared a similar interest, rather than as strangers. On the other hand Facebook was not considered as intimate as WhatsApp, since it still offered the option of friending complete strangers with no common interests. Twitter was not associated with intimacy, and continued to be seen as a public platform, where communication was with a faceless wider world. Further, though a majority of users felt that WhatsApp was much more addictive than Facebook, none wanted to move away from it.[80]

However, WhatsApp was still used on phones – and for young women the use of phones, as discussed earlier, was restricted, due to fear of romance and related caste transgressions. Their WhatsApp usage was thus clearly restricted. The caste, class and gender trends, which were visible for Facebook, repeat themselves for WhatsApp as well.

General messages, from the sharing of jokes and good wishes, or even sharing a prayer every morning, were a common practice. Even more common were everyday greetings, for instance wishing everyone 'good day' in the morning and 'good night' in the evening. All these practices are explored in Chapters 3 and 4.

Sharing of pictures, whether artwork or just selfies, group pictures, images of landscapes or of users' children,[81] was much more common than sharing videos. Personal video clips on WhatsApp were more usually related to a family function or a party. Sharing video clips of cinema comedies, songs, socially relevant messages, sarcastic clips on politicians etc., though common, was much less popular than the sharing of static visual images. However, the frequency with which videos were shared on WhatsApp increased in tandem with the increase in affordable higher internet speeds. These were either downloaded from the internet or forwarded to the user in the first place. Sharing video songs or audio files, which had previously happened through the Bluetooth functionality offered by most phones, had now moved onto WhatsApp.

For Panchagrami residents, WhatsApp added value due to the voice messaging functionality that it offered. For example, Lakshmi, aged 33, is now in her third job as a manager for a team of business analysts in a highly regarded IT firm. She has an eight-year-old son who attends a school in Panchagrami and a three-year-old daughter, while her husband works for another IT company in Chennai. Lakshmi uses WhatsApp often, claiming that it is what keeps her sane during intense work deadlines:

> I would love to stop working so that I can spend time with my children; my daughter is just three years old and I leave her with my mum or my mother-in-law who live close by. But it's just not the same as being with her myself.

By using WhatsApp, however, she sends voice messages to her mother's mobile phone,[82] mostly addressed to her daughter. Her messages had a warm, cuddly tone, and Lakshmi addressed her daughter as though she was right in front of her. Her mother would play this message to her daughter, then record messages from her daughter and send them back to her. Lakshmi also does this with her son, asking him about his progress on homework. This, she says, keeps her going; it is the next best thing to phone calls. Her busy schedule at the office does not afford her to have conversations over the phone, which are synchronous in nature. Yet a quick WhatsApp voice message helps her to feel connected to her

children. She admits that this saves her from a lot of guilt, and allows her to mother her children even from work.

Similarly, for middle-class homemakers at Panchagrami, who were mostly spouses of IT employees or entrepreneurs, WhatsApp also acts as a visual online tool of personal communication. Sharing jokes and artwork is an important part of their daily active participation on WhatsApp. Circulation and collection of arts and pictures becomes a sort of an electronic hobby requiring only electronic, not physical, space. The appreciation of novelty in craft assumes a different form with a ready audience in WhatsApp groups. Further, such circulation also speaks to the social life[83] of a joke or a picture, and how jokes in response to jokes assume a life beyond the original humorous comment itself.

For couples at Panchagrami, WhatsApp offers a unique decision-making capability. Decisions on buying provisions for the home are collective and are sometimes made over WhatsApp. The husband might be at his office helping his wife make decisions on buying a product at a supermarket, just by looking at its picture on WhatsApp. This helps in a way to undermine the constraints of absence and still to build intimacy.

Similarly, middle-class homemakers at Panchagrami in particular loved WhatsApp for the perceived[84] mobility that it provided. Homemakers often described how they could multitask with WhatsApp, and even message while cooking or taking care of other priorities at home.

There were different variables that contributed to understanding why a particular social media such as WhatsApp became a preferred media among a certain group of people (in this case homemakers) over another media. Speed of response (though asynchronic, it's almost assumed to be synchronic), ease of access to the media (over mobile devices) and the economy of using the platform were a few significant variables which speak to this preference. As WhatsApp played to all of these factors, and particularly to being synchronous and asynchronous at the same time (based on how one perceived it), it was a preferred medium. Further, though many homemakers maintained profiles on Facebook, their social media activity cycle showed that they were much more active over WhatsApp than over Facebook.[85]

The idea of asynchronous communication over voice was primary, not only for Lakshmi and other working mothers or to the homemakers discussed above, but also to young men such as Anand, striving to maintain his long-distance romance. Anand, aged 26, is in a stable relationship with a girl from his previous job. His girlfriend was transferred to Coimbatore, a city in southwest Tamil Nadu, and the couple has been apart for almost six months now. He sends her images of him

(selfies and posed-for pictures) taken in different settings, along with a voice message that speaks of his love for her. Earlier in their period of separation, Anand would either try to call his girlfriend or she would try to reach him over the phone. However, they had to slot times and plan ahead on when they would be free to chat. However, Anand declares that WhatsApp has taken his relationship with her to the next level, as his messages can be much more spontaneous. The couple shares numerous messages throughout the day.[86]

A major issue that female users in particular had with WhatsApp was the issue of sharing phone numbers. Though people perceived interest group members as acquaintances, a few women did still feel uncomfortable in sharing their phone numbers with strangers, although they had to do so to be part of an interest group on WhatsApp. For others, the issue was more of segregating their social circles. Even a casual contact or an acquaintance whom they had met offline and had shared their phone number for some reason could message them if they were on WhatApp. This was considered to be an intrusion into their personal space. For example Sindhu, a 45-year-old housewife, received a message from a previous male domestic help of hers in a greeting on WhatsApp. The case of Saroja, a 30-year-old housewife, was similar: she was sent a greeting by a male interior designer who had helped to design her previous home. Neither woman welcomed such communications, seeing them as intrusions into their privacy.

Yet these issues with privacy do not deter women from using WhatsApp. In fact WhatsApp in Panchagrami is an extremely popular tool among the upper middle-class housewives; they use it to organise community functions, programmes at local churches or even kitty parties.[87] For example, at the start of this chapter we saw how traditionally homemakers might send one of their children to borrow spices from a neighbour if they happened to run out while cooking. Now homemakers in larger apartment complexes send WhatsApp messages to friends living nearby if they discover they are running out of an ingredient while cooking; the child can then be sent to pick it up once the sender receives a response. In the case of lower socio-economic classes, however, borrowing spice still meant sending their children to their neighbours' homes without first submitting requests over WhatsApp.

There were also several instances where a middle-class husband, undertaking the grocery shopping, might send the picture of a product to his wife to check if that was the right product to purchase – similar to the example of couples helping each another with shopping decisions discussed above. A few homemakers also turned entrepreneurs,

using WhatsApp as their marketing channel; they thus marketed the product to their friends and neighbours,[88] perceiving them as potential consumers.

In some cases, the frequency of personal photos sent over WhatsApp was higher when compared to Facebook. For example Rangan, a 32-year-old driver with a popular taxi company in Chennai, often travels on business to Panchagrami; he takes selfies with the foreign IT delegates whom he drives from the hotel to offices. He sends these pictures to his friends on WhatsApp to showcase and build status among his peers, establishing himself as a person with international connections. Other personal selfies, taken while on duty, are sent to his newly married wife. At Panchagrami selfies are much more commonly distributed on WhatsApp than on Facebook, as it helps with privacy and controls (or is at least perceived to control) the audience to whom the user wants to send the picture. In Chapter 4, which discusses the family and relationships, we also explore case studies on the circulation of newborn baby pictures to immediate and close family members; such images are placed on WhatsApp rather than on Facebook in order to avoid the 'evil eye'.[89]

The perception that WhatsApp was more 'official' than Facebook emerged in the practice of some office workers sending text messages to their bosses/managers on WhatsApp.[90] An added attraction was that WhatsApp was free. While in 2013 WhatsApp was said to be a paid service after a year's use,[91] many Panchagrami locals professed their ignorance of this fact. A few that knew of this just reinstalled WhatsApp on their phones towards the end of the free year. This changed in January 2016, when WhatsApp announced a free service for life.[92] Nevertheless, it is doubtful that Panchagrami residents even knew of this change: for them, WhatsApp had always been free.

Though factors such as class, caste and gender do have an influence on the use of WhatsApp as well, there has been no detailed discussion of them in this section as in the case of Facebook. This is partly because, as mentioned earlier, several trends caused by these factors visible on Facebook repeat themselves on WhatsApp too. Significantly, these factors move into sharper focus in public-facing social media such as Facebook, which have public profiles for individuals. WhatsApp, being a more private platform than Facebook, has such factors pushed to the background. As a result this section on WhatsApp in Panchagrami has concentrated upon a more general discussion of the platform and its uses.

Twitter

Twitter did not seem to be as popular or widespread as Facebook or WhatsApp in Panchagrami. Survey results and interviews made it clear that Twitter was perceived as a platform for the educated and the rich,[93] while Facebook and WhatsApp were viewed as more democratic platforms meant for everyone. This was because Twitter was somehow associated with knowledge of English, and seemed like a medium that required exertion in order to gather followers. Further, communication over Twitter was non-directional and did not have a ready audience. In addition, one needed to have an active participation and work to gather one's audience, even though one did not need a Twitter membership to view others' tweets, as most were public.

Many such reasons were quoted, although some Panchagrami residents admitted they had signed up for Twitter – more out of curiosity about what the medium was than because they actually wanted to use it. Some tried and failed, such as Vinoth, a 23-year-old college graduate; he signed up for Twitter four times, each with a new handle, and ended up using none of them, as communication on Twitter felt difficult for him. However, he did read tweets of his favourite cinema celebrities. Several cinema celebrities from the Tamil film industry, known as 'Kollywood',[94] express their thoughts through their Twitter account and have a huge following.[95] Sarath, a 22-year-old college student, has a Twitter account only to follow his favourite movie star, named Dhanush; he doesn't tweet, re-tweet or share anything on the platform. Early on in his sojourn into Twitter, Sarath dabbled with posting pictures of his cinema idol, but he could not attract followers for himself.

Sarath, like Vinoth, has multiple Twitter accounts after his failure to attract followers. His guesstimate was around 22 to 25 accounts. He also constantly pesters a few of his friends to sign up for Twitter accounts and follow his favourite star's page. The reason is simple: Sarath wants to boost the number of followers that his star has on Twitter. He said it was the least he could do for his film idol. Similarly Priya, a 22-year-old college student, dabbled with re-tweeting tweets of her favourite film stars for some time before giving up, again because no-one was following her on Twitter. She felt that it was much easier to garner followers if you were well known offline; otherwise acquiring Twitter followers was something you really had to work at.

Many skilled IT employees were active to a certain extent on Twitter, however, or at least engaged with it on a passive basis. They felt

that Twitter was an ideal knowledge platform if you followed someone of repute, such as Guy Kawasaki or Robert Scoble, both 'thought leaders' from Silicon Valley. Many also followed Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, on Twitter. Although most of these users were sharing news and information through re-tweets, they agreed that they had to put in the initial effort of gaining followers for themselves. Suden, a 30-year-old business analyst with a major IT company, said that he followed several of his friends and they followed him in turn, thereby mutually boosting each other's follower numbers.

Twitter became a major tool of expression at Panchagrami when a female IT employee was murdered in the area. Several IT professionals, both men and women, took to Twitter to express support and concern for women working in their sector. Devi, a 28-year-old IT professional, explained:

> I tweeted saying women needed security immediately after the incident and all of a sudden I was retweeted and once the heat of the incident had died down none of my tweets received a retweet . . . my friends who are my followers sometimes do it to share information. Now I have followers who I don't even know . . . I have a sense of losing control over my followers, I don't really know who they are.

A few entrepreneurs used Twitter to promote awareness of their brand names. Most entrepreneurs preferred presenting themselves as 'thought leaders' on Twitter. One of these was Anandhi, a 45-year old expert in soft skills and communications, who tweeted to build her profile as a thought leader in communications. She said that her brand-building presence on Twitter attracted business for her. The case of Rishi, a 40-year-old technology entrepreneur and writer, was similar: his sole purpose for being on Twitter was to build a personal brand for himself. Several small businesses in Panchagrami existed on Twitter, but at least 70 per cent had now been inactive for some time.[96] Multinationals with a presence in Panchagrami were on Twitter, but their tweets were more global than local; their social media team did not appear to be situated in Panchagrami.

There was a strong sense of using Twitter with a purpose rather than as a means of everyday communication in Panchagrami. Comparing the usage of Twitter to that of other social networking sites such as Facebook or WhatsApp clearly showed that the kinds of messages exchanged on Twitter were different from those exchanged on

Facebook. Twitter was perceived to be a platform on which one had to be normative and politically correct. There was a fear that the internet community would troll you if you did something stupid on Twitter, requiring messages to be careful, normative and neutral. In contrast, it was easy to be your true self on Facebook, and even more so on WhatsApp.

Conclusion

This intention of this chapter was to introduce the social media and communication landscape at Panchagrami, beginning with the traditional forms of communication and moving on to explore the various social media platforms present in the area. In doing so, the chapter also presented the layers of complexities that govern social media use in Panchagrami. What also became evident was that both emotional factors, such as care and concern for a family and social factors like age, hierarchy, social status, literacy, gender, class and caste, which mutually influence each other and affect the traditional offline communication, also had an impact on social media.

Even the use of voice communication over the phone within families was influenced by several factors, including age, hierarchy, position, status within a kinship network and literacy, as evident in the cases of Mr Raghavan and Ravi's mother. They were further complicated with emotional concerns over children's wellbeing, as was apparent in the examples of Shobana and Lakshmi. While the solution proved to be synchronous phone communication in Shobana's case, it was asynchronous voice over WhatsApp in that of Lakshmi.

Such emotional concerns when influenced by factors such as caste, class and family honour take the form of social control and surveillance of social media. The impact of such concerns is specifically felt on gender issues. Social control and surveillance of women, which influenced their use of social media, can be classified into two kinds: hard restrictions and soft controls. Within the lower socio-economic classes and lower middle classes, hard restrictions manifested in four distinct forms:

1. Complete restriction: This occurred in the cases of male family members trying to keep a watchful eye on young unmarried women in their families and caste. The men barred these women from accessing social media for fear of inter-caste romantic

relationships that could shame them and their families within their communities.

2 Time restrictions: This form of control appeared in families who perceived themselves as 'less conservative',[97] since they allowed access to social media. Time limits on access over multiple devices were imposed, however, and a specific time limit strictly maintained.
3 Space restrictions: This again appeared in families who believed themselves to be 'less conservative'. Space outside the home was perceived as a potentially threatening, 'masculine' arena that could have a detrimental effect on girls and young women. They were thus allowed access to social media only within their homes under the watchful eyes of other family members. The concept of 'safe' space vs. elsewhere was constantly pronounced in these families.
4 Intentional surveillance: This was evident in families who allowed younger female members to be on social media, while limiting their friend contacts to their extended family or those whom the family knew offline. A strict surveillance was kept on young women's profiles, with families monitoring their social media posts. Such intentional surveillance also took place in families that imposed time and space restrictions.

Soft controls, which were generally unintentional in nature, appeared in families where family members had been friended online along with others. Though no specific restrictions were imposed on social media activity, the very presence of family members as friends ensured that these women self-censored their posts. Such a form of social control is also exerted on young men of different classes. Both teachers and students who friended each other on social media felt that such friending also led to soft controls. This scenario is explored in detail in Chapter 6.

However, in order to escape such surveillance, whether hard or soft, multiple profiles or fake profiles are created. For several social media users at Panchagrami, this seemingly fragmented way of expressing themselves, through a range of multiple profiles, in fact makes their identity more complete.

These issues were discussed in detail under this chapter's section on Facebook. However, several facets of these issues were also evident in the use of other platforms.

While WhatsApp's affordability and functionality makes it a popular choice for Panchagrami residents, it was often considered an

extension of SMS/texting functionality that allowed users to scale their communication, and thus move seamlessly between public and private spheres.[98] Factors such as emotional concerns, class and gender also influence WhatsApp's usage patterns.

Similarly, Twitter was closely associated with issues of class and literacy in English. For many living in Panchagrami, the platform involved exerting more energy to gain a following than was required for Facebook and WhatsApp. Some correlated popularity and brand-building over Twitter to offline popularity and others used it to build their brand images as 'thought leaders'. Fear of trolls on Twitter influenced the normative, non-controversial postings of users.

However, exclusive use of and existence on only one social media platform was rare; in Panchagrami there was a strong case of polymedia.[99] While there were people who ensured that they posted the same content concurrently on multiple platforms and kept their contribution to their networks active (for instance sharing links to a news story on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and WhatsApp groups in just one sweep), when it came to communicating with individuals interactions became more personal and contextual – a strong case of scalable sociality[100] as well.

Irrespective of the social media platform, another significant theme that emerges – due to social control by families on Facebook, or group norms over WhatsApp groups, or even of the fear of trolls over Twitter – is the expectation of social conformance. Once again this has a strong offline continuity. Chapter 3 will explore how this continuity between offline and online spaces influences social conformity, and how such pressures to conform lead to strategic presentation of the self to one's social network.

3
Visual posting: continuing visual spaces

Introduction

Thiru, a 21-year-old automobile mechanic, and his friends Vadivelu, aged 23, and Lakshmanaswamy, 19, travel on alternate Sundays to locations in and around Chennai to photograph themselves in shopping malls and other scenic tourist spots. The trio refer to these trips as 'Photo tours', and the pictures are specifically intended for display on their social media accounts. A few other friends are occasionally invited to join them, but it was mostly the trio who ventured out on such photo tours, using Thiru's clients' motorcycles. At least 60 per cent of the pictures on their respective Facebook profiles are from these photo tours.

While most of the group pictures taken in 2013 involved a lot of posing to the camera, the later ones in 2014 moved on to become selfies.[1] What remained constant, however, was the trio posing as a group. Though each of them had independent pictures of themselves on their respective profiles as well, it was the group pictures that really mattered to them. These group pictures showcased not only the young men's 'friendship' but also their lifestyles and the way in which they experienced their lives through friendship.[2] Uploading such pictures consistently on social media where their social networks[3] converged was very important to the trio, since this showed their true bonding as friends for life to the people who mattered to them.

Friendship is a celebrated ideal in Tamil Nadu.[4] A good friend or *'Nanban'* is perceived as having a higher status than one's own family or kin, and such friendships are viewed as chaste relationships. This ideal finds repetition in public discourse through popular visual media such

as Tamil cinema. With such concepts deeply embedded in youth ideology, following them and, more importantly, showcasing them to a wider society becomes important. These three young men do exactly that through their pictures on Facebook (Fig. 3.1).

Veena, a 42-year-old homemaker and a mother of two children of school age, lives in an elegant and smart three-bedroom apartment in a multi-storeyed apartment complex. She makes a point of taking part in several charity and civic events such as beach cleaning, charity marathons or even cooking for charity occasions along with her friends Anushya, aged 37, and Gowri, 45. None of these events are complete without selfies or posed-for photographs. These are immediately shared over WhatsApp, but only to a group of extended friends and family; Veena believes that such images reflect private moments in a public event, and so can only be shared with a specific group of people she knows personally. Veena does not have a Facebook account, and believes that showcasing pictures of her charity participation publicly would amount to exhibitionism. However, she does acknowledge that such images could encourage[5] her network of friends and family to participate in such charitable events by showing the fun to be had in coming together for a good cause. While philanthropic actions, volunteering for charity events and giving something back to society are considered important ideals for women generally in India,[6] they also form an important aspect of a specifically middle-class ideology.[7] For Veena these events double as

Fig. 3.1 Photo tour at a mall

opportunities for creating fond memories of being together with friends and for re-living them later.[8]

Rathinavelu, a 42-year-old entrepreneur, deals with supplying hardware materials to construction companies. Both Rathinavelu and his wife Alamelu, a 38-year-old homemaker, have Facebook accounts where they upload images not only of themselves, but also of their immediate family (including their two school age children and events and celebrations with their extended families or their closest friends, with whom the couple share a close 'fictive kinship'[9] relationship). Even their WhatsApp messages to their respective networks feature pictures of family outings or family get-togethers. Other than these, they also share moralising memes[10] and forward socially relevant comments and jokes or pictures of Hindu gods. Their social media albums are dotted with family pictures, both with their immediate and extended family (Fig. 3.2). Rathinavelu and Alamelu make a point of illustrating their family bonding to their social network, since strong family and kinship bonds are ideals in Tamil culture.[11] Such pictures on their Facebook page receive constant feedback and support in the form of likes and comments, or personal messages from their social networks.[12]

Fig. 3.2 Family picture posted on Facebook

Gurunath, a 20-year-old student of biochemistry, regularly posts pictures of his favourite Tamil film star 'Vijay', as well as pictures of the actresses who appear with him and posters of his star's upcoming film releases and earlier films (Fig. 3.3). These are uploaded for the networks of fans on Gurunath's social media and the actor's fan club page on Facebook. Fan clubs for popular male film stars are an important aspect of Tamil cinema culture, and have been a constant feature in Tamil Nadu for over half a century.[13] Predominantly a male club, the fans of an actor who are members of such fan clubs are expected to showcase their loyalty and sense of belonging. Gurunath does this on Facebook, where his network consists of actor Vijay's fans. The likes and comments he receives are typically from the actor's fans.

Each of the above cases is typical of a particular genre of visual posting by one of the many different groups of people who live in Panchagrami. What was significant in each of these cases was that this appropriation of an online platform as a space to showcase their cultural ideals, norms and everyday values was in effect a means for transmitting some larger and already established aspect of collective morals – for instance valuing friendship, charity, family or displaying loyalty towards a group or to a social network that the users deem important and identify themselves with.

This chapter on visuals thus deals with how for the people of Panchagrami the online visual space on social media is about showcasing larger established collective ideals, which have always found

Fig. 3.3 The actor Vijay with a co-star

a representation in the area's offline visual culture. It will provide a brief background of Panchagrami's offline visual culture by examining the public visual culture, the visuals at home and those that fall in between these two realms. It will then move on to explore their replications and continuity on social media by looking at public visual postings on cinema and politics, followed by visuals presenting private selves. Everyday greetings accompanied by memes that help build sociality with the online network are also examined as a third category of visuals that fall between the public and the private. By considering the above, the chapter shows how postings in the online visual space conform to the expectations of the social networks that people build for themselves on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

An overview of offline visual culture at Panchagrami

One of the major findings of this ethnographic research exercise across all nine field sites was that social media has made our communication more visual than textual.[14] While this represents a significant shift, it is still possible that this change, as well as the visual content, is mainly derived, in each specific instance, from prior traditions and genres.

Tamil Nadu, like the rest of India,[15] has been a visual society in both public and private spheres. Pictures have traditionally appeared as still images of gods, politicians, film stars, advertisements,[16] cartoons and caricatures[17] in the form of posters, billboards or large banners (locally referred to as 'cut outs') and moving images such as cinema in public[18] or through religious images,[19] calendars, framed photographs[20] and personal videos[21] at home.

Public visual culture

Tamil Nadu is a place where most events are celebrated publicly and visually, from cinema, cricket, religion, politics and birthdays to puberty-related rites or 'coming of age' ceremonies for women, weddings, deaths or any other life cycle ceremonies. Of these the most striking are the religious festivals and events relating to cinema and politics. Various religious festivals, depending on the seasons, tend to dominate the public visual culture of Tamil Nadu. For example, in the month of Aadi[22] (July–August) a celebration takes place for the Hindu mother goddess,

commonly referred to as Amman,[23] followed by festivals for Hindu gods such as Krishna and Ganesha.[24] All are celebrated with a public display of banners and posters that speak of celebrations in the nearby temples. Posters also announce celebrations at Christmas and Ramadan in the nearby churches and mosques. Several village festivals also follow suit with public and visual displays of devotion.[25]

Another striking genre that dominates Tamil Nadu is cinema.[26] Several researchers have attested to the extraordinary power of local cinema (popularly known as 'Kollywood')[27] and have noted its close relationship in Tamil Nadu to political success.[28] Tamil Nadu is arguably the only state in India that can boast of five chief ministers (heads of state) in the last half century who have had connections with cinema. In fact both Tamil Nadu's current head of state and the head of its largest opposition party have a background in the film industry.[29]

Panchagrami is no different when it comes to exhibiting visual culture, as proved by a drive down the main roads with their brilliantly coloured posters. For example, as the villages prepare to celebrate Aadi (a Tamil month dedicated to celebrating the village fair, with offerings to the Hindu mother goddess) local roads and streets are adorned with posters and huge banners of Hindu gods and goddesses (Fig. 3.4). A religious festival such as Deepavali (Diwali) is often heralded by a mixture of banners and posters of deities,[30] along with new cinema releases, images of film stars and advertisements of discounted product sales. Very often, Hindu gods and goddesses share banner space with local politicians, caste group leaders and local businessmen who sponsor free food distribution ('*annadhanam*') or entertainment programmes. The latter could typically be light music programmes (such as stage shows of

Fig. 3.4 Amman – Hindu mother goddess

popular Tamil cinema songs) or staged street plays ('*Therukoothu*') for the people of Panchagrami.

Posters of cinema stars and films adorn public walls and change to reflect new cinema releases,[31] the popularity of the star cast or the lead actor. While visuals in the form of 'cut outs' mostly appear around cinemas, posters for individual films are normally dotted over the entire area. At election time, or at the time of another political event, lifesize banners of political leaders based on that particular event spring up around the main roads of Panchagrami. Most often they are accompanied by laudatory remarks or rhetoric in Tamil for the party leaders, often praising them as '*Singame*' (the lion, which supposedly signifies honour), '*Thamizhane*' (the ideal Tamilian) or '*Thamizh Thaaye*' (the mother of Tamils) and so on. Such symbolic terms reflect the general political rhetoric used in Tamil Nadu.[32]

Most public visual material at Panchagrami is temporary in nature; it changes with the seasons and the events that represent the patterns of the year.[33] They are designed for impact and information, not to be remembered. Elections, political events, new cinema releases and festivals are catalysts for the frequent changes of such material. At home, however, visual material is of a different category; personal images are displayed for a longer period of time, and serve as artefacts to kindle memory.

Visual culture at home

At the homes of local residents one can find photographs of themselves, as well as images of gods and national leaders. Family photos, wedding photos, photos of children in elaborate photo frames and photos of dead relatives adorn the living room walls or the pages of photo albums. Video recordings (normally found as DVDs) commemorate functions celebrated in the family, such as birthday parties, puberty ceremonies, weddings, temple festivities of their family deities, or even house-warming celebrations. Most recordings are professionally made, either at a photo studio or filmed by a professional cameraman.[34]

In Hindu and Christian homes[35] pictures of gods and saints, along with small statues of various deities, adorn the altars where family worship is conducted. In Hindu homes calendars with pictures of deities are of two kinds, either plain monthly calendars or those with an almanac attached to them, which sometimes are more elaborate. Those in Christian homes were just monthly calendars.

The still images that move out of photo albums to adorn the cabinets or living room walls, where guests can see them, pass through a kind of a censoring process. Only images that are 'posed' for, and those that showcase a certain aspect that the family wants to display, are put on public display (Fig. 3.5). Pictures that adorn the living rooms are images that demonstrate attainment (graduation ceremonies or prize winning ceremonies), family photos that portray unity or pictures of a late ancestor that show remembrance of one's loved ones and the maintenance of a strong bond towards one's lineage.[36] Other pictures are kept in photo albums to renew memories when close family or friends visit. Embarrassing pictures never make it to the living room, and most often stay hidden in the photo albums.

Images displayed at home do not change often.[37] They are sometimes archived, but are rarely destroyed, in contrast to the images that define public visual culture at Panchagrami. They serve as artefacts for passing symbolic information (such as attainment or family unity) to a guest, and also for memorialisation within the family.

People living in Panchagrami do not generally bring life-size posters into their homes. They clearly demarcate the zones for such visuals, except for those that can be classified as 'in betweener' – belonging completely to neither the public or private realm.

Fig. 3.5 Photograph showcasing personal achievement

‘In betweeners’

Certain images fall somewhere in between home display and public display. These are usually in the form of large banners announcing a family celebration, such as a marriage or a puberty ceremony of a young girl, and are most often found along sections of the main roads of Panchagrami (Fig. 3.6). Such banners feature not only the images of the bride/bridegroom, the girl who has attained puberty or the child whose birthday is being celebrated; they would also very often carry the names, and sometimes the images, of the people who wish for the event to be a great success – mostly close friends or kin. These images are specifically geared towards letting their social networks (caste group members, people from neighbouring villages, distant relatives etc) know of an event in their family, and the strong sense of bonding that they share with the person is demonstrated by erecting such banners. Most of these banners or posters are temporary and – with the exception of a few retained for sentimental value – most are destroyed after the event, as are political and film posters.

Here again domestic images of a family event may move to the public area. Most do not return back home, however: they are geared

Fig. 3.6 Family announcement in a public space

towards addressing specific messages to specific social networks, after which their job is done.

How does social media reflect this visual culture?

Visual material and visual-related functions constitute a major portion of everyday activities on social media at Panchagrami. These could range from uploading images to sharing, liking or commenting on the visuals. Affordable technologies, especially smartphones with cameras (front- and back-facing) and pre-paid mobile internet connections, have played a large part in visual-related functionalities becoming central to social media usage at Panchagrami.

The images that people of Panchagrami post on their social media (Facebook and WhatsApp) are not very different from what are seen offline. They generally fall into either one or more of the categories listed above, i.e. public, private or 'in betweeners'. The pictures generally considered to belong to the public visual culture of Panchagrami, such as those of religious festivals or Tamil cinema stars, or even those of politicians or political issues, are usually deleted after an event or the season (just as their offline counterparts are). If not, they descend lower in the Facebook album space (chronologically) and are updated with newer ones higher up the page. Such images are either shared or uploaded onto Facebook. The people who uploaded such images onto Facebook from their mobile phones sometimes use Facebook as a cloud to store images, thereby saving on their mobile device's storage space.

The personal pictures uploaded on Facebook profiles are not deleted when they are replaced with newer ones; they just remain archived in the albums. One can observe that it is mostly the upper middle-class women who keep updating their profile with recent photos,[38] as events in their lives unfold. These personal pictures are most often saved on their phones as well as on their Facebook walls. Wedding invites or greeting cards for festivals or family events – or even everyday greetings with worded memes, specifically targeting a social network of friends and family (just like the 'in betweeners') – are saved on their phones and posted onto their Facebook walls. Yet only a few remain saved or archived on their phones or Facebook after the event; others are deleted, to make space for new updates. Most often the temporary nature of images on Facebook reflects the offline nature of these images. This is seen above in the case of saving images for memories,

or using them to communicate a specific piece of information to a social network.

Continuing visual culture

In order to showcase how the offline visual culture continues onto social media, this section is also divided into the three categories of public, home and in betweeners discussed above as representing visual culture offline. The first section deals with the online visual postings on cinema and politics, which fall into the category of public visual culture. This is followed by visuals of the users themselves, which fall into the category of visual culture at home. Finally we explore the everyday greetings that are embedded in the Tamil culture, discovering how people bring this to social media and in a way relate it to a cosmological understanding of Hindu theology. Since the latter section of this chapter discusses religion, the section on public visuals will only discuss cinema and politics. Before moving on to considering these categories in detail, however, it is important to understand the scale of visual postings on social media at Panchagrami.

There are a couple of things to note with respect to the visual postings to be discussed in this chapter. Firstly, though video clips related to cinema and politics do float around on people's profiles, this chapter will only deal with the still images, as these occur with greater frequency than moving images. In addition, visuals at Panchagrami are a mixture of both original and forwarded content. So while not everyone at Panchagrami produced original visual content on social media, several took an active interest in sharing and forwarding visual content that they came across on Facebook and WhatsApp.

A snapshot of visuals at Panchagrami

In order to provide a snapshot of the scale of visual postings, the following exercise was carried out using the Facebook[39] profiles of a sample of 20 Facebook friends from Panchagrami (Table 3.1). The sample pool consisted of 10 women and 10 men, covering a broad age range of 15 years to 67. The photos included all visuals found on the person's Facebook photo albums, i.e. tagged or posted of their own accord. The following statistics refer to both original and forwarded content, for example memes are generally forwarded/shared content.

Table 3.1 Facebook metrics relating to visuals at Panchagrami

Total number of visuals	1367
Min number of visuals	18
Maximum number of visuals	102
Average number of visuals	68
Average percentage of pictures including the informant	43%
Average percentage of pictures showing the informant alone	20%
Average percentage of pictures showing the informant within groups	23%
Average percentage of pictures featuring memes	38%

Section 1: Public

Cinema

As noted above, Tamil cinema is a very popular[40] form of entertainment at Panchagrami, and you can very often find the Facebook profiles of young college students dotted with images of Tamil film stars (Figs 3.7 and 3.8). The most popular in this area seemed to be two male actors, Ajith (referred to as '*Thalai,*' meaning the head or leader) and Vijay (referred to as '*Thalapathi*', meaning the commander-in-chief). Fans normally enter into networks that like and support a specific actor, then post images of him or share his images on their albums. A peak in such activities is normally witnessed when a famous actor's new film

Fig. 3.7 The actor Ajith in the film 'Veeram'

Fig. 3.8 The actor Vijay in the film 'Puli'

is scheduled to be released on a certain date, or just before the star's birthday. Pictures of the film's promotional material are shared on social media through such networks.

Very often these are the same images that appear across the area on either posters or banners when the film is released. People also post social media images of their star with his family (portraying an aspirational vision of an ideal family), at a public event or even enjoying lighter moments together with his co-stars, highlighting the sociality of their favourite actor (Fig. 3.9).

Historically such genres of images have long been seen in Tamil Nadu. Pictures of the former chief minister, the late Dr M. G. Ramachandran[41] (MGR in popular reference), who was also an extremely popular film star, appeared on posters around Tamil Nadu almost 40 years ago (Fig. 3.10). Such images have been repeated with other film stars, who have become celebrities in their own right.[42]

As seen in Gurunath's case at the beginning of this chapter, such images when posted by the actors' fans indicate loyalty to the star. They thus receive a lot of likes and comments as responses from other fans on their network. However, the scale of responses to each fan posting such images is highly enhanced and visible when it is done on social media rather than offline.[43]

Pictures of Tamil film heroines also circulate on social media (Fig. 3.11). While it is mostly young men who post images of Tamil film actors, both young women and men post images of Tamil film actresses on their social media profiles. The pictures of popular actors most often remain the same, while the images of Tamil actresses (especially those

Fig. 3.9 Cinema: various faces of actors Ajith and Vijay

Fig. 3.10 Cinema: various faces of former actor MGR (M. G. Ramachandran)

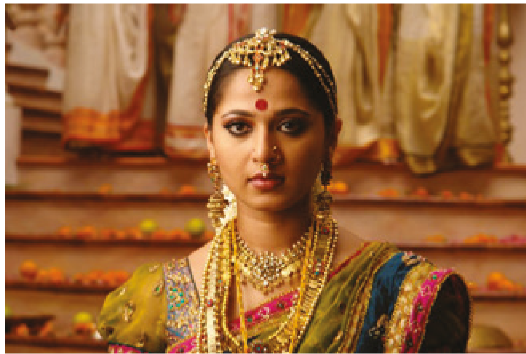


Fig. 3.11 Cinema: the actresses Nayanthara, Anushka and Nazriya

playing the heroines) are more transient; they change as frequently on social media as they do on cinema posters offline. This reflects the more transient position that the film actresses hold within Indian cinema, and as such has a historical precedent.[44]

Both young men and women tend to use pictures of actors and actresses as their profile display pictures. They do not create them, but either download such pictures from the internet or film websites or use forwarded pictures.

Politics

In Panchagrami the offline visuals pertaining to politics – namely banners and cut outs – fall into four major categories: the local level, regional level, national level and international level. The local level generally consists of local representation of major state-level, or sometimes even of national-level political parties.[45] Officials at local level play a major role in governing the local village and town councils. The offline 'cut outs' or banners generally feature the state party leader, with a small image of the local representative at the bottom of the banner. You are also aware of the importance of gender here, as it is normally men who are actively involved in presenting political power through offline visuals. In this area it is generally frowned upon for women to display their pictures on public banners, even though they may be interested in politics.[46] Such a display would be regarded as a deviant social practice by their close networks, and as a result most women tend to avoid this practice. Though there are women representatives in local party politics, the practice of featuring images of local women, especially unmarried women, on the party posters occurs rarely, and only if they are really well known.[47]

Posters are mostly laudatory of the party leaders, and are pasted onto public walls by party workers belonging to a specific party. Such activity has been a part of Tamil politics for a long time now, and it is also reflected in the social media visuals of party workers in Panchagrami.

The following examples all show support for a state level political leader. For example, the images of DMK[48] leader Dr M. Karunanidhi and his son (the future leader of the party) Mr Stalin are uploaded only by members of this party, or by members of allied parties during elections (Fig. 3.12). With a few party leaders such as Mr Stalin present on social media,[49] the images of themselves in party meetings that they post on their official social media profiles are also shared and replicated by party workers.

Fig. 3.12 Politics: Dr Karunanidhi and Mr Stalin

Similarly pictures of Ms Jayalalitha, the leader of AIADMK,[50] also appear on the profiles of members of this party.

One deviation from this pattern may derive from caste concerns. For example, Panchagrami has a significant population of Dalits (Scheduled Castes). Pictures of the late Dr Ambedkar, a national leader and founding father of India who represented the Dalit struggle for social justice and equality, are frequently posted on Facebook profiles of the party workers of the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK, or Liberated Panthers Party), a major representative of the needs of the Scheduled Castes. The local party representatives mostly tend to do this, to show their commitment to and identity with the cause of social justice and equality (Fig. 3.13). As a political strategy, members of various

Fig. 3.13 Politics: garlanding Dr Ambedkar's statue

other locally represented political parties now also vie to post pictures of Dr Ambedkar on their social media profiles.

As noted in Chapter 1, a portion of Panchagrami is a reserved constituency for the election of members of Scheduled Castes/Tribes for leadership positions in the village council. Several belong to the VCK party. Mr Thirumavalavan, a Dalit leader, heads the party at the state level and pictures of him are plentiful on the profiles of a few informants who either belong to this party or support the cause that it raises (Fig. 3.14). Pictures taken with the party leaders are also common, as they showcase the support, influence and status of the person posting the image. As noted above, the area has a strong and long-established public visual culture, and sometimes it is the most prominent forms of these visuals – such as the offline 'cut outs' and posters of the Dalit leader – that are reproduced on Facebook[51] or WhatsApp.

Fig. 3.14 Politics: the Dalit leader Thirumavalavan

However, this does not preclude people from putting up posters that highlight other social issues, for example alcoholism or corruption. Posters such as these are often either satirical or show concern; they attack only the top state or national party leadership, or are sometimes even related to international issues that might affect the state or the nation. Local representatives are almost never criticised. This pattern is more or less replicated on social media too. It is certainly a safer strategy, since it is less likely to incur the anger of local friends and colleagues who support a different party and are also on Facebook or Whatsapp. The issues or the party leaders are often caricatured[52] or morphed, and the visuals are then shared on social media (Fig. 3.15).

Fig. 3.15 Politics: sarcastic and satirical memes of social issues

Although it is usually long-term residents from the lower socio-economic class (generally men who are already involved in politics) who contribute to the offline visual banners at Panchagrami, political visuals as postings on social media transcend class boundaries. The postings of the lower socio-economic classes are often laudatory of one party and scornful of others. However, the middle classes often post visuals and satirical memes on issues arising at state, national or international level, such as the images presented above.[53]

These expressions of scorn normally take the form of trolling, a common activity in social networks to which most people do not seem to object. Instead they accept it as a form of humour (teasing, or the social joking process known as *'Kalaaikarthu'* in Tamil) – again viewed as something that is normative and conforms to an expected pattern of behaviour.[54] While mocking politicians through caricature has always been part of Indian culture,[55] sharing electronic trolling on social media has become more democratic. For example, trolling of Vijayakanth, a Tamil cinema star turned political leader, takes place over both Facebook and WhatsApp (Fig. 3.16). While younger groups of users might share this on Facebook, middle-aged ones tend to share them on WhatsApp groups.

The next section will deal with visual postings of people on social media, which can be compared to visual culture at home.

Fig. 3.16 Politics: an example of trolling Vijayakanth

Section 2: Private and home

At Panchagrami social media images of oneself may be compared to the pictures found in one's living room. Living-room photographs are on display to visitors, and hence very often tend to conform to the norms of propriety and gender expectations. Pictures of oneself on social media also tend to conform to the same norms and expectations. Normally pictures such as these are tailored to garner as many likes and positive comments as possible from one's own network.

This section begins with the simplest and the most overt presentations of the self. It then moves on to illustrate how people present themselves through association with others, and the contexts in which they place themselves. This section is thus divided into subsections/categories for ease of understanding, and it contains images from Facebook.

Category 1: The focus is on me!

Starting with an overt individual portrayal of oneself, many images are clearly created for the sole purpose of being posted on social media (Fig. 3.17).

As can be discerned from the pictures above, they do not really have anything significant in the background, nor show the exact location of the subject or offer clues about what he or she does. The idea behind such pictures is simply to ensure focus on the person, not the background. Most often the person in the picture knows that they are

Fig. 3.17 Private: 'the focus is on me!'

being photographed and they pose accordingly. These constructed images are quite distinct from the ideals of authenticity and informality evident in some of our other field sites. In addition, as posing is an important aspect of such pictures, these pictures of the individual are invariably taken by someone else and are not 'selfies'.

Almost all pictures such as these have the individual's approval before they appear on Facebook; very often the subjects themselves post them on social media. Such photos are not shot in studios, and neither are these pictures scanned and posted on social media. They are invariably taken in digital formats through digital cameras, and sometimes on smartphones. While men of all social classes post such pictures, only upper middle-class women tend to do so. Both men and women tend to portray themselves in modest clothing, conveying diginity and self-respect.

Though such pictures normally go on to become display pictures or profile pictures, usually garnering likes or positive comments from their network, in some cases you might find friendly trolling or banter, such as the example below (Fig. 3.18).

Such trolling is only accepted from a friend whom the respondent knows very well offline, and with whom he or she shares a offline similar relationship of friendly teasing. This jocular banter in itself (known as '*Kalaaikarthu*' in Tamil) conforms to the expectations of a strong friendship network. This style of commenting with images alone is of note here. They normally stop after a maximum of two to three exchanges.

Profile Picture

Comment
Ayoooooo! (meaning OMG!)

Fig. 3.18 Private: 'friendly' trolling on display picture

Category 2: It's about what you do!

While a simple personal image may suffice, the first obvious extension is a portrayal of a person in association with something they do. This may refer to an occupation or work, but equally could represent an interest or a hobby with which the person keenly associates himself/herself (Fig 3.19).

Visuals of this kind are not just simple portrayals of the individual. Such pictures very often form an inherent part of building the person's identity. They normally appear in the individual's online photo albums, and some are shared in WhatsApp groups as well. They are not tagged, nor do they have a photo by-line. These images are intended to drive home a point. Very often it is the type of material object shown with the person in the picture that draws attention to the identity that the person wants to create. This could be a microphone or a computer and have a symbolic meaning associated with them, as can be witnessed in the images in Fig. 3.19. The backgrounds of such images may also assume immense importance.

These are very similar to the pictures that one might encounter in the living rooms of homes at Panchagrami. In such open domestic places, pictures that present the subject in some kind of identity-defining space, or with materials signifying identify, are placed. For example, lawyers at Panchagrami often have photographs of themselves in black robes placed in a prominent space in their living rooms.

These identity-building images draw upon both symbolic material objects and the background of the picture to help define and conform to gendered roles. Singing at Panchagrami is very often considered a female activity, for instance, and tends to enhance notions of femininity. The microphone in the picture complements such associations. For men, the gym and a well-built body are considered symbols of virility and masculinity. Such associations are carefully crafted to enhance the identity of the person in the picture.

Category 3: Background showing status

The third category is one in which the image tries to enhance the status of the individual though association with objects or backgrounds. This might be achieved through the social setting, for example showing foreign travel, or proximity to material goods, demonstrating aspiration or achievement (Fig. 3.20).

Fig. 3.19 Private: 'it's about what you do!'

Fig. 3.20 Private: background showing status

These images differ from those in category 2 by declaring the social status of the person, and tend to signify a particular aspiration or achievement. These pictures tend to portray the aspirations and the expectations of twenty-first-century society. They conform to the social expectations that Panchagrami, as a knowledge economy, places on individuals – for instance owning a luxury car, an apartment or experience of foreign travel.

Category 4: Self in a group (friends)

Young people often prefer to be photographed along with their friends rather than posing alone. At the extreme end are young unmarried female students from the lower middle or lower socio-economic classes, many of whom have no individual pictures of themselves on Facebook, although they do have pictures taken with friends (Fig 3.21). This may be simply because the pictures in question are tagged as images shared on their profile, and have not been uploaded by the women themselves.

Sometimes profiles of young, unmarried women have group photos of young men known to them offline on their photo albums. The young women upload the images themselves, or are sometimes tagged in pictures as noted above. You would not, however, find a young, unmarried woman posting pictures of herself alone with a young, unmarried man; if such a picture did exist it would most probably have a social setting, such as a party or wedding, to it, or be a picture of a close male relative. More usually, you would find group pictures of young women posing together, or young men posing with other young men. Generally, when a picture featuring young unmarried people of both sexes appears online – whether as a selfie or as a posed-for photograph – it is always a group picture, not a picture of a couple. The exception to this rule occurs when young unmarried women from the upper middle classes are involved. For this group, posing for photographs alone with young men is not necessarily seen as social non-conformity.

Category 5: Self in a group (family)

Once people are married it is generally thought appropriate that public representation should no longer focus upon the individual, but be orientated to the couple's new status as part of a family. This is especially true in the cases of married women (Fig. 3.22).

Fig. 3.21 Private: self in a group (friends)

Fig. 3.22 Private: self in a group (family)

Pictures of children, highlighting the ideal of motherhood and family life, recur frequently in the social media profiles of mothers in Panchagrami, as do pictures featuring other immediate family members. Also, while the background of the picture sometimes achieves prominence, the image of the family is usually more important. The intimacy that exists in the family tends to be shown in the pictures uploaded onto social media. These pictures draw upon the institution of family – mostly nuclear (with husband and/or children), rather than the background – in order to show with whom the person posting the images identifies himself or herself. These pictures are thus taken equally both inside and outside the home. These pictures convey a sense of belonging, and are sometimes scanned from old printed copies or photographs

found in albums offline. They are intended both for showcasing familial intimacy and for memorialisation.

In conclusion, while these pictures express different aspects of the self that the users want to portray, they most often conform to the social norms and expectations of the society and the social networks to which the user belongs. Even aspirational pictures tend to illustrate a collective aspiration that the society sets for itself; nothing that could be considered deviant would be shown. It is a kind of social contract that the responses to such pictures are always positive; teasing, if any, is gentle and reinforces the strong bonding offline.

The five categories discussed above illustrate representations of the self in various forms. We now move on to consider the next type of visual postings at Panchagrami, that of everyday greetings. This category is similar to the idea of 'in betweeners', aspects that generally fall between the public and more private realms. Everyday greetings most often tend to be followed by a meme, which also acts indirectly as a form of moral police.[56] Memes are very popular at Panchagrami and are of various kinds. As exhaustively examining all kinds of memes is not possible in this chapter, the next section examines only those associated with everyday greetings – a form posted frequently (up to as many as five times a day) by people from all social classes. Personal photographs tend to showcase the relationships with an immediate circle of family or friends to a larger network maintained on social media; everyday greetings help to acknowledge and manage this larger network on a daily basis. They also act as a way of maintaining and reaffirming the sociality that is a part of the everyday offline culture at Panchagrami.

Section 3: 'In betweeners'

Daily greetings

Rajappa, a 67-year-old retired postmaster, was introduced to WhatsApp through the senior citizens' club that functions in his residential complex. The group (composed of members aged over 60) has around 45 members, most of whom have at least one child working abroad. Several recurring themes underlie the messages in Rajappa's WhatsApp group: daily greetings with prayers; forwarded visual messages about health, exercise and diet; forwarded picture puzzles; and visuals about nature. Daily messages in this group start at around 4:30 am with a 'good morning' message, often accompanied by a meme with a prayer.

By 6:00 or 6:30 am, almost all members will have sent each other a 'good morning' message or a visual accompanying this greeting. Most prayers are generic; if they do have the image of a Hindu deity, it is most often that of Lord Ganesha (Fig. 3.23) or that of Shirdi Sai Baba.[57] Most of these are either forwarded messages or replications from Google Images.

Rajappa is quietly sentimental about what he reads on his WhatsApp every morning. He feels that his day will be positive only if he reads something positive, and for Rajappa (and several others in his senior citizens' network) an important aspect of sociality is greeting everyone with a smile. For them this is a positive sign to start a day, and since this group does not regard a 'smiley' symbol on WhatsApp as comparable to a real smile, a prayer or a positive message is seen as a necessary compensation.

Daily greetings are an important form of sociality at Panchagrami. One can witness this in the 'good mornings' heard during the daily morning exercise walks favoured by the middle class, in the friendly '*Vanakkams*'[58] uttered by the milkman, or the humble salutation of a student. Such greetings are regarded not only as something that builds sociality, but also as a positive way to start the day. This acquires yet another dimension when expanded to accompany inspirational quotes of famous people, and displayed on the exterior walls of schools,

Fig. 3.23 'In betweeners': image of Lord Ganesha with a greeting

panchayat offices and other public spaces. Such greetings are very often also extended onto social media platforms, where they take the form of everyday greetings accompanying visuals that are pleasing to the eye or carry inspirational messages.

Images that portray a motivational, philosophical or religious message are designed so that they can be forwarded and shared with others. These visuals may have words embedded in them, or sometimes occur along with captions, when they can be categorised as memes. These memes tend to be positive and have a 'feel-good factor' associated with them. Such messages are often accompanied by greetings related to the time of day ('good morning', 'good evening', 'Have a nice day' etc). These greetings are also viewed as an effective way to keep in touch (through an ongoing conversation) with the social network that you may have built up on social media.

These visuals can be categorised into a few major subgenres such as motivational quotes, religious quotes and so on. At Panchagrami these wordy images are normally followed with an everyday textual salutation as shown here (Fig. 3.24).

Some of these images consist mainly of words, aesthetically designed in different colours or creative fonts. They usually constitute a quote from a famous person, or are images randomly picked up online. A few people specifically download images accompanied by philosophical or motivational words from the internet through a Google image search, and forward these to their social media contacts.

Some people consider it as one of their primary duties to share such images to their network on Facebook or WhatsApp every morning. They regard this gesture of sharing positive messages as a gift to the wider society, seeking to balance the amount of negativity that exists all around. Homemakers tend to practise this on WhatsApp,

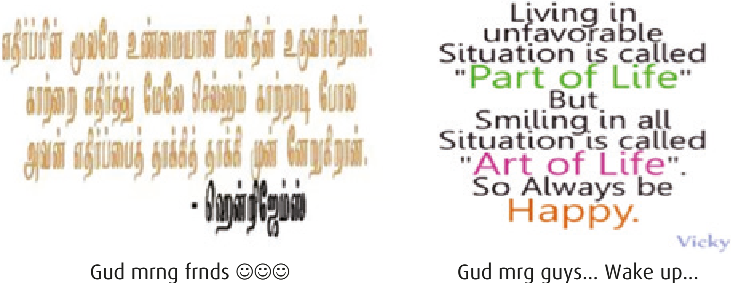


Fig. 3.24 'In betweeners': textual memes along with everyday greetings

while college students often send such messages on both WhatsApp and Facebook. For example Kanna, a 21-year-old student of business administration from a lower socio-economic background, began to do this a couple of years ago as a final-year school student; he did so in order to help his classmates and friends (specifically those also from lower socio-economic backgrounds who were both studying and working to help their families financially). He has continued this practice religiously and has expanded it to encompass his college circle too. Kanna's fellow students endorsed this, commenting that they waited to see what quotes he would post on his Facebook profile every morning. This practice was also geared towards building sociality within his intended network.

Several other users also posted daily motivational or religious quotes (which also tend to be motivational). They usually contain a religious symbol indicating the religion within which it originates (Fig. 3.25). However, all such messages tend to follow the everyday salutations of 'good morning!', 'good afternoon!' or even just a generic 'have a great day!'

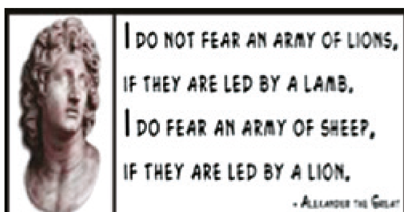
Some images such as these are simply words without a background image (Fig. 3.26). For other everyday salutations, however, the words are complemented by an appropriate visual.

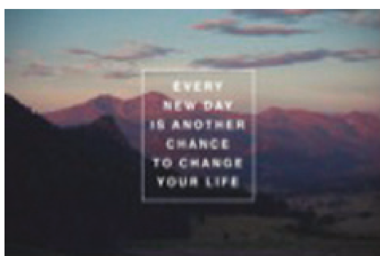
It is not unusual to see scenic landscapes used as everyday salutations. They very often occur with religious or motivational quotes, and are intended to not only showcase the beauty of nature, but to also hint that the world is a much larger space – the creator of which would also take care of the recipient or the reader of the message.

Fig. 3.25 'In betweeners': images with motivational or religious quotes

Hope u hd a grt day
Good Evening...

Good Evening ☺☺☺





Have a good Day...

Good Evening Friends

Fig. 3.26 ‘In betweeners’: everyday greetings accompanied by visuals

Thus everyday salutations are in a way used to keep in touch with an already established group of friends. Interviewing informants revealed that once they had a set group of Facebook or WhatsApp friends, keeping in touch with everyone became an important part of the process – otherwise the question of what to do with an accumulated capital of friends on social media arises. In order to circumvent such concerns, everyday salutations became a major practice,[59] through which everyone in an informant’s friends list is actively engaged in a positive and non-confrontational way. Some users even remarked that people who are generally non-communicative on their networks tend to become more responsive when such a practice is established with them.

However, these kinds of messages are not only seen as a method of building sociality and maintaining contact with an accumulated group of friends; they are also used for accruing positive karma points, which have a specific religious connotation. Several middle-aged informants from Panchagrami participated in activities on Facebook that can be related to some form of religion; even if they did not categorise it as a religious activity, it was always related to building good karma,[60] which again stems from a religious belief that 'what goes around comes around': good actions will lead to good outcomes. Participation can range from posting pictures of deities or religious messages to encourage positive self-development to sharing inspirational poems and stories to provide positive reinforcement to wider society, thus building good karma for the giver/poster. Some people followed this as an everyday routine, as Vidya Shankar did.

Vidya Shankar, a 47-year-old architect, is an active builder of good karma on Facebook. He feels that since most of his social circle is on Facebook, he can use his network as a receptive audience to build good karma for himself. Shankar's everyday routine involves posting an image of a Hindu deity (usually that of Krishna or Ganesha) on Facebook before 6 am (Fig. 3.27).

Shankar adheres strictly to this practice, since he knows that most of his middle-aged Facebook friends follow a routine of checking Facebook first thing every morning. So, in order to ensure that they wake up to an auspicious symbol every day, he posts an image of a Hindu god on his timeline slightly before 6 am.

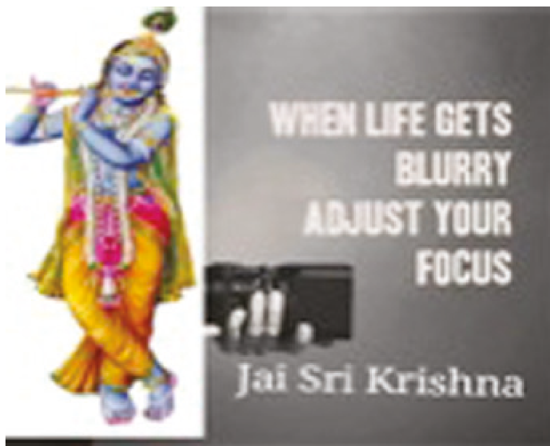


Fig. 3.27 'In betweeners': Vidyashankar's image of Lord Krishna

In an interview Shankar noted:

> I know people have checked it, when I start receiving 'Likes' immediately after I post . . . it's mostly the same set of around 40 to 45 friends of mine, but receiving immediate feedback is effective, since I know that I have built the necessary good karma for the day; and I am sure that as they 'share' it with others, it will not only help build their karmas, but also mine, as I help build theirs.

Sudhasri, a 39-year-old homemaker, builds her karma points by posting positive messages every morning on a WhatsApp group with around 35 members. She posts a positive saying adapted from a religious book to this group, along with a 'good morning' message (Fig. 3.28). Sudhasri explained her belief as follows:

> My messages can help people start their day on a positive note, since even getting up in the morning is a miracle and I don't want people to waste their god-given day . . . a positive start can help have a joyous day . . . I have done something good for the day then.

Vidya Shankar and Sudhasri are not alone. Several informants believe that routinely participating in giving goodness to the society (their immediate social circle) can help them to reap good Karma.

A majority of these visuals are not produced (creatively made), but shared – either through Facebook or WhatsApp. For Sandeep, a 31-year-old software engineer, the recipients of such images actually

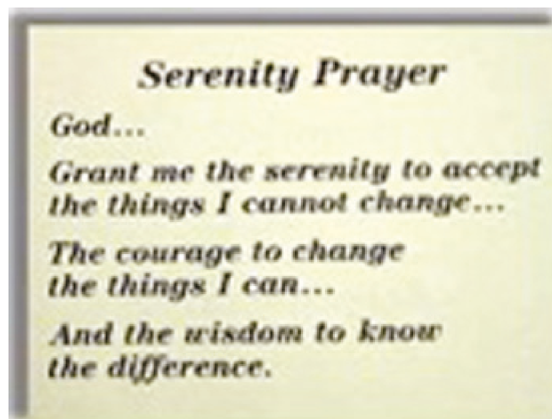


Fig. 3.28 'In betweeners': Sudhasri's prayer on a WhatsApp group

have God-given opportunities to build good karma falling on their laps: all they have to do is to share it with others. With such sharing, it was no wonder that some of these images acquire a social life[61] of their own, doing the rounds and transitioning between media – email to Facebook to WhatsApp, and repeating themselves in cycles within these platforms.

Mixed genres

The categories of visual posting described above are not exclusive. The case studies of Jyotsna and Sagayam illustrate how people at Panchagrami use a mix of genres strategically to craft and present an image of themselves to the different networks with which they communicate, in order to conform to the dominant expectations of those networks.

Jyotsna is a 33-year-old homemaker. She lives with her husband Samuel, aged 39, and their two children in a high-rise residential complex in Panchagrami. She grew up in a small town in the south of Tamil Nadu and moved to Chennai only around 10 years ago, after her marriage to Samuel. The couple decided to settle in Panchagrami since Samuel worked as a systems architect in a major IT company there, and bought a two-bedroom apartment in 2011.

A devout Christian, Jyotsna attends prayer services at a church close to Panchagrami. To keep in touch with the regular members of the church and to plan events, a WhatsApp group was established, to which Jyotsna very soon became a regular contributor. In this group, her posts are only visuals with images of Jesus Christ and memes with prayers (Fig. 3.29). Most of Jyotsna's messages are forwards that she receives from her other contacts, or are downloaded from Google Images.

Jyotsna's residential complex also has a Facebook group for formal apartment maintenance issues, as well as an informal WhatsApp group intending to promote social contact between residents. In the latter, Jyotsna's contribution is a meme with a positive message every morning. None of these messages are religious in nature: instead they take the form of positive phrases that can be broadly classified as 'motivational' (Fig. 3.30). The responses from group members to such memes have always been encouraging.

Jyotsna also belongs to another WhatsApp group with just four of her close friends: Priya, aged 38, and Devi, aged 37, both homemakers, and Vasanthi, a 33-year-old Tamil lecturer at a local

Fig. 3.29 Mixed: image of Jesus Christ from a church WhatsApp group

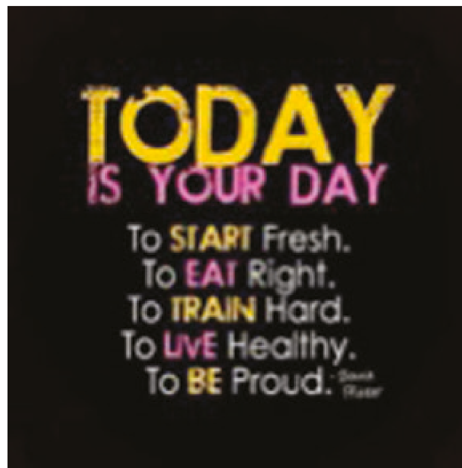


Fig. 3.30 Mixed: a motivational meme from a WhatsApp group focused on the same apartment complex

college. Jyotsna constantly forwards humorous memes and shares pictures of her family, including those of her children's school functions, as well as pictures of dishes she cooked at home (Fig. 3.31). Such messages elicit similar visual responses from the other group members.

Sagayam, a 21-year-old student of commerce at a local arts and sciences college, has around 110 friends on his Facebook account. The friends group is a mixture of college friends and women whom he had met only on Facebook. Sagayam's Facebook timeline features

Fig. 3.31 Mixed: Poondu Pulikolambu[62] in a friends' group on WhatsApp

Fig. 3.32 Mixed: a scenic meme from a Facebook wall

just pictures of beautiful scenery (which he had downloaded from Google Images and had posted on his Facebook wall) or of babies (Fig. 3.23). These images are often accompanied by a greeting of 'good morning' or 'good evening', and several of them elicit high response rates from his friends (especially female friends). Typical responses are comments returning a greeting of 'good morning' or 'good evening', along with a 'like'. Sagayam's albums contain pictures of his posing for the camera, a couple of selfies and several pictures with his friends. In contrast to the scenic and baby pictures, his

personal photos were only liked by his college mates, or by those who also appeared in the photographs.

Sagayam is also a member of a Facebook group dedicated to Dhanush, his favourite Tamil film star. He regularly posts pictures with news updates of the actor, downloading them from Google Images or other film websites (Fig. 3.33). Responses from other group members have always been admiring, not only of their favourite film star but also of Sagayam's activities, recognising his contributions to the group.

Sagayam is also an enthusiastic user of WhatsApp. He has a part-time job as a sales assistant at a supermarket in Panchagrami, where he keeps in touch with his colleagues and his supervisors outside work hours through WhatsApp. Although Sagayam has not digitally categorised them into a WhatsApp group, he constantly forwards humorous and socially relevant memes to a select network of his work colleagues (Fig. 3.34).

The profiles of both Jyotsna and Sagayam revealed that over 70 per cent of communications to their network of contacts were visuals.

Fig. 3.33 Mixed: a favourite film star, Dhanush, from a Facebook fan page

Fig. 3.34 Mixed: a humorous meme forwarded to work colleagues

What is more important, however, is the underlying trend in their visual communication: the genres of visual communication change depending on the network with which they are communicating. Jyotsna's messages to her church group were different from those she communicated to her residential group, or to her close friends. Jyotsna was clear that she would not really want to send pictures of Jesus Christ to her residential complex group, as it had members belonging to different religions. This was also the case with her close friends group, two of whom were Hindus. So she was careful not to include religious posts in these groups. Sending positive messages to her friends group was considered fine, but sending pictures of her homemade food to her church group or her residential complex group was something she would not do, as that was not the expectation of these groups. In her close friends group, however, the expectation was that members would exchange family pictures, and so she did.

Similar was the case of Sagayam, who sensed that uploading scenic pictures or those of babies along with a greeting almost always triggered a universal response of liking and commenting on his profile. The messages also kept the conversation flowing and his profile active. This would not have occurred if a picture of the film star Dhanush had accompanied those greetings to this specific network of friends. Similarly, views of natural landscapes on a fan page for Dhanush would also have not received many favourable responses. Sagayam likewise thought that a humorous or a socially relevant meme forwarded to his

work colleagues elicited positive responses on WhatsApp as well as when he met them offline at work.

What is significant in both Jyotsna's and Sagayam's cases is that the genres of visual communication were different in different networks. Each was consciously crafted to cater to the dominant expectation of the network. Such modification was all done strategically and was thought to have an effect on the network with which they communicated, irrespective of the network's size.

In Jyotsna's case there was an overlap of home and 'in betweener' visuals, as discussed above. In the case of Sagayam the overlap was between public images and 'in betweener' visuals. Both of their profiles are typical in showing how social media profiles at Panchagrami usually cluster categories of images, creating a mixture of three visual genres.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to show that continuity exists between online and offline spaces; each influences the other in multiple ways and neither can be studied as a discrete component of people's lives. Visual material has always played a significant role in the popular culture of Tamil Nadu, and these traditions have clearly had a huge impact on the way people communicate on social media,[63] leading to the emphasis upon continuity in this chapter.

This chapter explored the most frequently occurring genres of visuals at Panchagrami – namely the visual postings on cinema and politics, postings relating to the self, and everyday greetings. These were compared to the visual culture embedded in the public sphere, at home and in the realms 'in between'. The appropriation of social media's visual space was also seen to express offline cultural ideals.

At the outset, it might seem as if we were only observing people's public personas as expressed on social media, rather than their private selves. Yet at a fundamental level, in a society such as Panchagrami,[64] the question arises of what is public and what is private for these users of social media. Most visual communication online or offline, as we have seen above, is a case of users transacting with their social networks, which could vary in both size and form. The idea in such communications was to conform to the expectations of the network to which the users who were posting belonged. Privacy is relative, with complete privacy existing only for an individual and their own thoughts. However, there are key differences between communication intended for the more

intimate circles of relatives and friends, and those intended for wider circles, negotiating a spectrum of scalable sociality.[65] Far less self-censoring was required for the more intimate group, where trust between members is strong. For wider circles people felt they had to conform,[66] unless they employed alternative strategies such as fake profiles to express dissent.

For example, if someone posts selfies or other pictures of themselves on their profile, it is pretty rare to find a direct criticism of such pictures as being overtly narcissistic in the comments section. Dissent in these cases is expressed by not liking the post – by silence. An intimate friend might express his or her opinion through an alternative channel of communication, but once again their relationship offline matters before such comments are made.

This is often seen, even on the 'public' postings connected to cinema or politics. Once again these are in conformance with the network the users maintain on their social media profiles. If someone posted a picture of his or her favourite film star, their network, even if members favoured a rival actor, would not directly oppose such postings. This does not necessarily mean that people in a network express no opposing views at all; it was just that views, even when expressed, are always done within a safe threshold.

Similarly, in the event of someone posting controversial visual material, such as a pornographic clip, his or her contacts might just cut off the relationship by unfriending them, rather than explicitly expressing dissent. However, there were cases where pornographic clips were exchanged between intimate circles of friends on WhatsApp rather than on Facebook. Once again, these were examples of conformance to the networks to which participating individuals belonged.

However, these expressions are not something that are visible solely online. They have strong correlations with prior patterns of offline traditions, which encourage such conformance to avoid conflicts within social networks, as considered earlier in this chapter.

And so, regardless of public or private spheres or the size of networks, the dominant expectations of the networks influence visual communication at Panchagrami. Most often people seek to be seen as conforming to these expectations. Even the 'in betweener' visuals, namely the daily greetings that tend to take the form of memes, seek to conform to the normative expectations of the larger network. In seeking to maintain online sociality, they thus reaffirm the sociality that is part of the everyday offline culture of Panchagrami, and also indirectly act as a moral police.

This chapter has demonstrated that on the one hand there is considerable continuity between traditions of visual expression in offline spaces and those of online spaces. For online visual posting, however, there are the additional issues of the audience for whom this material is intended and the degree of privacy required. This then sets up some of the issues discussed in subsequent chapters. Chapter 4 is concerned with the relatively private domain of the family and close friendships, while the later chapters consider the wider and more public spheres, especially work and education.

4 Relationships: kinship on social media

On a quiet afternoon in December 2013 Govindan, a 33-year-old hardware goods trader, invited me to discuss his Facebook profile over tea in his already crammed 200 sq. ft office space at Panchagrami. Very soon the discussion turned to his Facebook 'friends' (around 130 people at the time of the interview). He soon started identifying his Facebook 'friends' either with a kinship term such as *'mama'* (uncle), *'annan'* (elder brother), *'machan'* (brother-in-law), *'sister'*, *'bro'* (a shortened version of brother; Govindan specifically used this term for younger men), *'pangali'* (co-brother), or with a deferential 'sir' or 'madam', though the use of the latter terms was less frequent. At first glance it looked as if a majority of Govindan's family (including his extended family) were online. Very soon, however, it became clear that the group he was identifying with kinship terms was a mix of Govindan's actual extended family members and several of his friends, to whom he referred in terms of fictive kinship.[1]

Though he referred to at least 17 of his friends as *'machan'*, Govindan had only one real *'machan'* who was not even on Facebook. He referred to almost nine of his friends as *'pangali'*, though in actual life he had none. Similarly segregating his 'sisters'[2] (actual sisters, as opposed to his cousins[3] and his female friends) was another exercise in itself. However, it soon became clear that he identified only those people with whom he had professional relationships and who were of a higher socio-economic class as 'sir' or 'madam'; all the others were addressed as if they were actually related to him in some form.[4]

Govindan's behaviour is typical of several others in the area who use kinship terminologies to address relationships.[5] Though people such as Govindan clearly know the system of addressing their relationships, to an outsider it could at first seem daunting and confusing.[6]

In order to understand the social structures of Panchagrami, we need to understand the nature and form of relationships existing within

and between its different layers. Relationships of various kinds govern Panchagrami, be they within a family, between extended families or even within caste groups. Likewise an examination of how these relationships migrate onto social media is central to understanding the use and consequences of social media in this region.

The basic social group in Panchagrami could be a family or a caste,[7] an organisation or an institution, a neighbourhood or even a residential complex. Each of these social groups brings its own form of relationships (kinship, employer–employee, peer–peer, friendships, romantic relationships etc.), some governed by hierarchy and power and others of a more egalitarian nature. If we are to understand such a complex pattern of intertwined relationships, it is best to follow the example above. This shows how the dominant idiom for most relationships starts at the most basic level, namely kinship.

This chapter therefore deals specifically with relationships that can be broadly classified as kinship. Chapter 5 discusses relationships within an office space and relationships in educational institutions, particularly in schools, are explored in Chapter 6. However, as we have seen from Govindan's example, friendship also needs to be included in this chapter as in Panchagrami it is incorporated in the form of fictive kinships. The use of social media within kinship circles is thus the overarching theme of this chapter.

An introduction to kinship in Panchagrami

The family system in Panchagrami, as we saw in Chapter 1, is typically patriarchal[8] in nature; it can either be classified as nuclear or extended. A typical nuclear family in Panchagrami consists of four or five members, usually the husband, wife and two or three children. However, this basic unit will differ based on several factors,[9] for example the marital status of the children or a husband's close relative (such as a widowed sister or mother) living with the family, etc. Often the nuclear family setup is merely the base for an extended family, with grandparents, uncles and aunts living together in the same house.[10]

This kind of setup is more evident among Panchagrami's long-term rural residents who retain this traditional system of South Asian kinship.[11] Take the example of Ganesh, a 23-year-old resident of Panchagrami; a college student, he lives in an independent house (i.e. not an apartment) with his parents, his widowed paternal great-aunt, his two unmarried younger sisters, and three brothers (all older and

married) and their families. This family, which can be classified as upper middle class, thus consists of 15 members, all of whom live under one roof and cook in one large kitchen.

Another example would be Sangeetha, a 32-year-old homemaker with a son and a daughter. She lives in Panchagrami with her husband Gangadharan and her in-laws. The family lives in a modest, one-bedroom house and can be classified as being from a lower socio-economic class.

This is not to say that 'regular' nuclear families, consisting of two parents and their children, do not exist in Panchagrami. Mathew, a 30-year-old married plumber, lives with his wife and year-old daughter in a rented house, close to his brother's house. Mathew moved to the present location two years ago, when he got married. Though the two brothers and their families meet each other every day, cooking is still carried out independently by the respective families.

While the long-term residents (from middle and lower socio-economic classes) live in either a joint[12] family system or have relatives close by, typical nuclear families with no close relatives appear in the cases of migrants from the lower socio-economic classes.

Moving on to the middle classes, given that average professionals in the IT sector receive higher pay than counterparts in other industries, these inhabitants of multi-storey residential buildings are Panchagrami's new middle class.[13] Though one can classify the family structures of several apartment complex dwellers as typically nuclear, it is also apparent that the family system[14] for these residents is slowly changing into a pattern neither entirely nuclear nor completely joint. Most of the middle-class families who inhabit these apartment complexes seem to be nuclear families when viewed as separate units. However, a trend of siblings and parents investing in apartments in the same complex is now gaining ground. For example, if a married daughter or a son has invested in an apartment[15] in a residential complex, parents or siblings may invest in an apartment in a neighbouring block of the same complex. They tend to cook as one household if they are in adjacent apartments, or to exchange food as and when needed. The pattern of elderly relatives staying with their sons is also not uncommon given the patriarchal structure of these families. Another interesting dimension to the joint family system emerges with grandchildren, who often have the highest priority in such households. Grandparents often take care of grandchildren while parents, typically IT professionals or entrepreneurs, are at work. This arrangement is not entirely unprecedented in traditional village life. There members of an extended family may appear to be living in different

houses, but in fact regularly come together to cook around the hearth of a particular house.

Consider the example of Shanti, a 28-year-old married IT employee whose husband, Sundaram, also works in the IT sector. They live with their five-year-old son on the twelfth floor of a multi-storeyed apartment complex in Panchagrami. Shanti is an only child and her parents have moved to the same apartment complex; they occupy a two-bedroom apartment on the eighth floor of the same building. This allows them to be near their daughter and take care of their grandson, while not intruding into the privacy of Shanti's family.

The case of Bhuvana, a 36-year-old IT employee, is similar; in this instance it is her in laws who have moved to the apartment next door to hers. Cooking is done by her parents-in-law, with meals either being sent to Bhuvana's house or the whole family eating together in either of the houses. Scores of other cases in Panchagrami reflect the same pattern; cooking is normally done in one house (normally in that of the elders), with the families of the younger generation either eating with them or receiving food packed and sent to their own home for consumption.[16] If the kitchen hearth is what defines families, then those described above are particularly interesting. At the outset they might appear to be two nuclear families living in two independent houses, but in reality they are one joint family living independently of one another.

Once again, however, this is not to say that nuclear families with no other relatives living with them or close to them do not exist in Panchagrami. On the contrary: they exist in large numbers owing to the influx of IT migrants and other investors in the area. Ravindran, a 44-year-old IT entrepreneur, represents the growing model of entirely nuclear families.[17] He lives in a three-bedroom apartment with his wife and three school-age daughters in a large apartment complex at Panchagrami. His brother lives in Kolkata (a city in northeast India, formerly known as Calcutta) while his sister is in Punjab (northwest India) owing to her husband's career in the Indian army.

Madan and his wife Poorvi, a middle-aged couple in their late forties, are in a similar situation. Both work for a family business that they own, while Poorvi's sister lives in the USA and Madan's sister in Australia. This couple live with their golden retriever in a three-bedroom apartment in Panchagrami.

As noted above, a significant trait seen at Panchagrami is that of extended families living close to each other, either in an apartment complex or in independent houses in the villages. However, when extended families stay in independent houses in a specific area, with

further family members acquired through marriage and birth, the area may become dominated by a certain inter-related caste group.[18] In one of the villages that make Panchagrami, for example, the long-term original inhabitants are all related to each one other. They belong to the same caste group and trace their origin to the 12 initial settlers in this area, who belonged to a single caste group. Each of these 12 settlers was called '*Thalakattu*', or the patriarchal head of the family, also considered in the introduction. Although oral history records this group as an endogamous group, marital agreements from other villages did occur (while still maintaining caste endogamy). So now, 120 years later, the natives of this entire village will always address each other in kin terms,[19] although not all of them know precisely how they are related to each other. The use of fictive kin terms as a substitute for original relationship terminologies is prolific in this area.

At this point we can see how understanding the family structure helps us in turn to understand some other key organisational principles. Castes and subcastes are closely related to family, and can indeed appear like an extended family, partly because most marriages are endogamous. Such an endogamous system in this area first ensures marriages within one's own subcaste group, already consisting of families networked through kinship. This is further emphasised by having one's identity since birth associated with such a system. An individual can therefore map a network of traceable relationships, not only with respect to his or her own lineage but also to more distant relatives twice or thrice removed. Several such endogamous subcaste groups go on to make a caste group in this area.[20]

In order to understand the patterns of communication and of social media in Panchagrami, one needs to follow this cross-pollination of family with class, caste, gender and age.[21] Using the family as an overarching category, we will thus focus upon inter-generational communication (parent–child and grandparents–grandchildren), communication between couples, communication between siblings, between extended families and that of friendships as fictive kinships.

A key component of this chapter is to understand how these different relationships map onto different social media platforms, and to explore the possibilities that arise within each. Communication within a close-knit family or within a specific social network (whether extended families or fictive kin) usually takes place only over channels that provide privacy; Facebook is hardly ever the preferred platform in these contexts. However, WhatsApp is increasingly seen as the platform that accommodates such family-based personal communication. For families

Facebook is more or less seen as a demonstrative platform; a certain level of performance takes place on it by different family members, but this is always directed to the outside world. This happens in cases of parent–child or grandparent–grandchild relationships, and specifically occurs in upper-middle class families. It is less true in lower middle-class or low-income environments, due to the absence of family members from these classes on Facebook.

Intergenerational communication

The role of social media in understanding filial relationships at Panchagrami and its influence in changing communication patterns provide us with a better understanding of the relationships themselves. A striking feature within a family at Panchagrami is the significant role played by a mobile phone. In Chapter 2 we discussed the importance of mobile phones in Panchagrami. This chapter provides a brief overview of mobile phones within a family context before examining the role of social media in the framework of intergenerational communication.

A mobile phone[22] is the major networking tool for intra-family communication. It has surpassed, and in some cases replaced, the traditional landline. Though mobile phones offer voice and text communications, the elderly members of most families at Panchagrami have retained their perception of phones as basically a voice-only medium. Further, even amidst a host of other communicative media, including the internet and a plethora of social networking sites, communication within a family mostly happened through voice. Parents, very specifically mothers, almost always seem to prefer hearing their children's voices rather than receiving texts from them. Family members mostly communicated with each other by calling rather than by texting. Generally the kind of parental insistence on the mode of communication that their children had to adopt while communicating with them demonstrates how age acts as a principle of hierarchy in determining the media to use. Education levels and literacy skills also impacted on the choice of one media over another in the case of lower socio-economic classes. Yet this pattern of trying to keep family communication entirely within the realm of voice occurred irrespective of the socio-economic class to which the family belonged.

At Panchagrami a typical nuclear family from a lower socio-economic background normally has access to at least three mobile

phones – one for each parent and one for the son. Daughters are not usually allowed access to a mobile phone.

The mobile phone owned by the mother is mostly treated as a landline, collectively owned by the entire family; it becomes a shared object. The mother is normally a homemaker[23] (though in certain cases she might help her husband with agriculture work for a few months of the year). A daughter is not normally given a mobile phone until she starts attending college or finds employment – or, in some cases, until she gets married.[24] There were several instances at Panchagrami where marriage or employment gave a daughter the appropriate status to own a mobile phone. Young men from these families have no such restrictions placed on them. In a typical family, communication normally takes place between the father, mother and a son over a mobile phone; a daughter normally uses her mother's mobile phone to communicate with the rest of the family, as in the case of Ravi's family, discussed in Chapter 2. Mobile phones thus become shared devices among female members of the family. While a daughter might face restrictions on phone use even in her early twenties, a son may get to own a phone at the age of about 15. Such age disparity by gender when it comes to owning communication devices affects the social media use in the lower middle classes and the lower socio-economic classes in Panchagrami.

The kinship diagram below indicates the general trend in the use of mobile phones in typical nuclear families from the lower socio-economic classes in Panchagrami (Fig. 4.1). In this illustration the blue triangles indicate men and the pink circles indicate women. An 'equal to' symbol represents marriage and vertical/horizontal lines show the offspring.

Once again in Chapter 2, the case of Ravi's mother indicated this pattern of continuity between the mobile phone and landlines as voice-only media. Such biases based on gender (where young unmarried women are not allowed a mobile phone) are sometimes visible even in middle-class families living in the villages (and even more so in families from the lower middle class). Here caste-based tradition binds the families in making such decisions.

While there exists a gender bias in the use of mobile phones in the lower socio-economic class and lower middle-class families, however, such biases based on gender are not normally apparent in upper middle-class families, who tend to inhabit large apartment complexes.

At Panchagrami filial relationships come with a stress on emotional bonding. The constant need to ensure their children's wellbeing becomes a priority and precaution takes precedence over all other

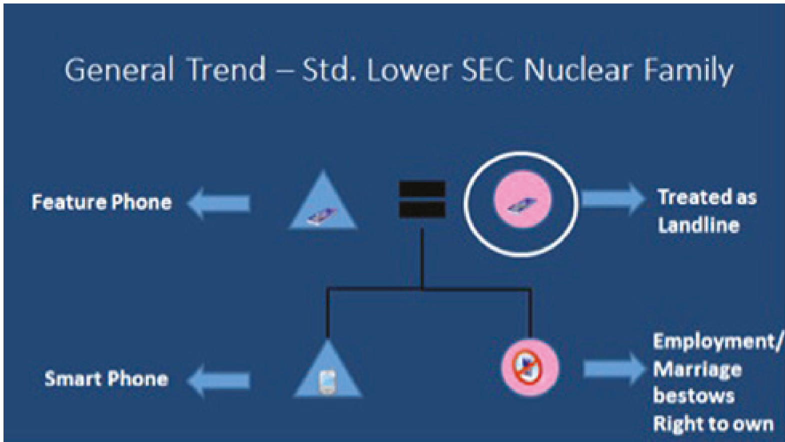


Fig. 4.1 Phone ownership in a typical lower socio-economic class family

factors – especially with daughters, as seen in the case of Shobana's parents described in Chapter 2. Though Shobana actually comes from a middle-class family in the village, the same issues apply to upper-class families with school-age children.

Sukrithi, for example, is a 14-year-old student in the ninth grade of an affluent international school in Panchagrami. Her after-school activities include swimming, singing, karate and tennis, and extra academic tuition. Given that both her parents work, she is taken to these activities in a Honda City sedan car by her driver, and is also accompanied by a female childminder through the early evening. To make sure that her status is always updated to her parents, she was given a Samsung smartphone as a present after promising to keep them informed of her whereabouts. Last year her childminder received a Nokia feature phone to keep Sukrithi's parents informed of their daughter's schedule. Sukrithi, embarrassed by this, had stated that she could attend to her schedule herself. To keep track of her movements, her parents gave Sukrithi a smartphone, but only on the condition that it did not have an internet connection (3G or 4G). The smartphone was mainly intended to be used for calling her parents; if they were not able to take the call, she had to text them to let them know where she was after school.

The emotional bonding that focuses on hearing the voices of children to ensure their wellbeing is not gender specific; it happens with the parents of young boys too. Rahul's case provides a typical example.

Rahul, aged 15, is also a ninth-grade student; he attends another affluent international school located very close to Panchagrami.

He lives in a multi-storeyed apartment complex located in the field site. Both of Rahul's parents work for IT companies and normally return home only around 7 pm, or sometimes later. So Rahul stays with his maternal grandparents (who have bought themselves a home in the same apartment complex) after his return from school at around 4 pm until his parents arrive back from work. The ritual that is stressed is the need for Rahul to call one of his parents to let them know that he has arrived at his grandparents' house. His parents then call him on his mobile phone (a Samsung smartphone) at around 7 pm to let their son know they are home. They also call his grandparents to let them know of their arrival.

The above examples all refer to parent–child communication that involves a teenager or unmarried child. At this point it seems suitable to re-introduce Mr Raghavan, also discussed in Chapter 2. He is a diligent planner when it comes to communicating with his sons. In his case neither marital status nor the distance matters – even married sons living in different cities retain traditional voice communication with him.

Raghavan, aged 65, is an upper middle-class Brahmin.[25] Before retiring he was the head of training and development for a major pharmaceutical company. He invested in a smart, two-bedroom apartment at Panchagrami immediately after his retirement, and lives here with his wife, who has trained herself as a Montessori school teacher; she is also a specialist in a traditional Indian art form known as Tanjore painting.[26] One of the couple's sons lives in Bangalore and works for an IT company, while the other lives in Connecticut, USA. Raghavan and his wife own iPads and Samsung tablets, along with a Blackberry (for Mr Raghavan) and a Samsung smartphone (for Mrs Raghavan). They also own two landline phones. Further, they have a post-paid connection with Airtel[27] (India's largest provider of mobile telephone services), through which they have a CUG (Closed User Group). Calls within this group are free, and the Raghavans' son and daughter-in-law in Bangalore are within this group. They normally chat with their son and daughter-in-law on the phone on weekdays and catch up with them over Skype from their tablets over the weekend, giving them a chance to see their granddaughters too. In addition Mr Raghavan also owns a VOIP[28] telecom service called Magic Jack. Calls to the US are free of cost on this service, with the subscriber being assigned a US number in India. Once a month the entire family (from the US, Bangalore and Chennai) tries to get together for at least an hour, so that Mr and Mrs Raghavan can see all of their grandchildren and the young cousins can

see each other. Before getting on Skype over the weekends, however, Mr Raghavan follows a mini ritual:

> Step 1: Call[29] both his sons, asking them if they are free on a particular weekend
> Step 2: Call each son individually, just before the call, to confirm availability
> Step 3: Call each son over the phone again if he has failed to turn up within a certain time
> Step 4: If financial matters have been discussed over Skype, send a follow-up note on the discussion

His wife comments that he tends to formalise discussions and loves setting up these kinds of calls.

Mr Raghavan noted that he was disappointed to see his grandchildren using mobile phones at the ages of 9 and 10. Whenever he calls them, therefore, he rings their home landline, not their mobiles. His wife added that the grandchildren now understand their grandfather's preferences and recognise that they need to speak to him over the landline or Skype.

Mr Raghavan clearly uses his age and relationship as principles of hierarchy and power to determine channels of communication with his granddaughters. He does not send or receive text messages with his family. He also takes into account whether his daughter-in-law's parents are staying with the couple in Bangalore before setting up Skype calls. If they are present, Mr Raghavan calls his grandchildren only over the phone; he talks to them, but ends his conversation early. His attitude towards media use with his immediate family can be best summarised in his own words: 'if one is alive, better to hear their voice than see them mute.' Although this may appear to be a case of media multiplexity,[30] where the strong bond that Mr Raghavan shares with his grandchildren triggers communication over Skype and landline, what needs to be noted is that all his communication channels have *voice* as the overarching theme. The theory may prescribe that strong bonds use more media to communicate, but what is of note here is that this is not straightforward: it is influenced by the cultural context, as in Mr Raghavan's case.

This case in a way leads us to another aspect of intergenerational communication, that which occurs between grandparents and grandchildren. Parents working as professionals in the IT sector may encounter an ever increasing demand for travel to onsite projects[31] (including foreign assignments), in some cases for long periods of time, based on

the particular project or sometimes the foreign client for whom they work. There are several cases where IT employees invest in a house, live there for a couple of years, and then are asked to relocate to the USA, UK or another country for a particular project. For those who move abroad to the project sites with their families (husband/wife and children), the husband's parents may well decide to occupy this house until the family returns, instead of leaving it empty and locked up.[32]

In another scenario, several elderly couples invest in houses in Panchagrami, typically after the husband retires. They tend to live in gated communities and to socialise with similar couples. They usually stay in India for a period of six months and move to their son/daughter's house in the US or UK for a period of six months or so (as in the case of Mr Raghavan, whose son lives in the US). In such cases, though communication between the married son/daughter living abroad and the elderly parents living in Panchagrami does take place, the urge to communicate with their grandchildren seems to be particularly high. Although pictures of their grandchildren are often seen on Facebook, or are sent to the grandparents on WhatsApp, a bi-monthly Skype call or a Google Hangout becomes more or less a ritual. Similarly, in several cases, though the weekly general communication between elderly parents in India and the son/daughter abroad takes place over the phone, when it comes to communicating with grandchildren a visual with voice (typically Skype/Google Hangout) always takes precedence. If it is not possible to make a visual connection, grandparents are satisfied with at least hearing a grandchild's voice. This pattern is typically seen in families with grandchildren under the age of 10 years and living at some distance.

For example Varun and Varenya, 10-year-old twin grandchildren of Mrs Sarada and Mr Namashivayam, have a weekly Skype call with their grandparents. Sarada was given an iPad as a present on her last trip to the US over Christmas. It was 'given to her' by her grandchildren (though their parents paid for it). Sarada claims to have been taught by the grandchildren how to use Facetime and to Skype. Now every week, they get on either of these platforms for a conversation, though these can be very brief. Sarada noted that there were times when it so happened that she would have more conversations with her grandchildren than she did with her daughter (the twins' mother). She is also on WhatsApp, with a group named after her grandchildren, in which her unmarried son, her daughter, her son-in law and her daughter's in-laws (parents, sisters etc.) are also members. They constantly exchange messages and pictures over this group.

In the cases of both Mr Raghavan and Mrs Sarada, although voice remains the most significant factor, use of multiple media for communication is also evident. The only difference between the two cases is the higher frequency of visual accompaniment (through either Skype/Facetime) in Sarada's case. Both the examples above illustrate aspects of media multiplexity and polymedia.[33]

Mrs Geetha Thiagarajan, who sends messages to her daughter advising on the care of her newborn baby over WhatsApp, is a similar example. Her previous conversations with her daughter were over Skype, where they mostly discussed family gossip and Indian recipes that her newly married daughter could try in the US. Mr Thiagarajan jokes that since their daughter's marriage and subsequent move to the US, his wife has spent more time on Skype chatting with their daughter than she does speaking to him face to face.[34] Following the birth of their first grandchild, most conversations now centre on childcare tips. When their daughter's in-laws visited the US, conversations moved on to telephone and WhatsApp, in order to respect their daughter's time with her in-laws; it was seen as inappropriate to hold her daughter back on Skype for too long when her in-laws were visiting. (Of course, pregnancy-related nausea and tiredness was also a part of the reason why long Skype calls were not possible.) Though their daughter is on Facebook, Geetha, as well as her daughter's in-laws, had advised the daughter not to upload pictures of the child on Facebook for now, as it might lead to an evil eye.[35] So pictures are exchanged instead over emails or WhatsApp. Even the single picture that her son-in-law uploaded onto Facebook immediately after the child was born, to let everyone know the good news, was deleted after advice from Geetha.

Several grandparents believe that uploading pictures of their newborn grandchild on Facebook will lead to this phenomenon of the 'evil eye'. However, they appeared happy if a picture of a new baby appeared on Facebook after a couple of months. Facebook 'likes' on photographs taken of very recently born babies which have been uploaded onto Facebook are seen as an indication of the 'evil eye' too. They agree that thinking so might seem superstitious to outsiders, but reiterate that in their experience the evil eye does exist, and social media such as Facebook could be a medium to cause it. Such views can best be summarised in the words of Mrs Kalyani, a 68-year-old with a newborn grandson in the US:

> The people who you know are the ones on Facebook as well, so you very well know who is of what nature, so why give them a chance to harm you (by casting an evil eye)?

However, uploading and passing newborn pictures on WhatsApp to the nearest and dearest relatives (specifically to grandparents who have not been present during the child's delivery) is not frowned upon. Such images are designed for those people who matter most, and who would also be upset if they were not informed or shown a picture of the new baby. In conforming to the expectations of these family networks, therefore, the pictures are sent, but only over WhatsApp. Here again Facebook is seen as a public platform (or a platform that caters to a larger network) and WhatsApp as a more private platform (fostering a network of strong ties). The middle-class and upper middle-class elderly specifically split and categorise media as 'private' and 'public', and so decide which aspect needs to appear where. Their word on platform use is usually maintained when it comes to deciding the best way to communicate intimate, inter-generational family issues.

Another concern that the elderly reveal about new communication media relates to how important life events of extended family members are communicated to them. Several elderly people, such as Mr Raghavan and Mr Karan (discussed in Chapter 2), ascertain that social media fails to recognise age or hierarchy, while voice and personal calls do.

For elderly relatives, communication within a close-knit family should necessarily take place by voice rather than texts when it comes to detailed or important communication with parents or grandparents. Little or no communication is routed through a social networking site, and these play no role in fostering a channel of communication between children and parents or grandparents who live with each other. The social networking sites assume a role only when it comes to communicating with immediate family members who have migrated to other locations within India or abroad, for education or for work. Physical distance as a variable determines the use and interplay of visuals in communication as well. Skype or Google Hangout come into play only when the distance between the communicating parties is substantial.

While media is clearly categorised for intra-family communication, we will now move on to examine how families employ social media (especially Facebook) to play a significant yet strategic role in fostering public[36] communication.

Though Facebook is not a preferred platform when it comes to communication between close-knit family members, it is much preferred as a channel to perform and showcase family intimacy to their intended social circles. In short, the exhibition of love and intimacy occurs over two cycles – one operating in the private sphere, within a

limited strong-tie network, and the other in the public sphere (specifically on Facebook) for a larger network to see.

Mrs Mythili Vijayan and Mr Vijayan, for instance, have a seven-year-old granddaughter who lives next door (a typical example of extended families living in adjacent properties as discussed above). Mythili's son Shankar posted a picture of his daughter on Facebook after her first day in a Western music class. Before being posted on Facebook, the picture had made the rounds of the immediate family circle on WhatsApp for a couple of weeks, with each family member remarking on how sweet the little one was; this admiration had quietened down after the first couple of days. However, when the picture was posted on Facebook, both the grandparents commented on how their 'little angel' looked, followed by their daughter-in-law's comment. This was then followed by several other comments from Shankar's sister who lived abroad. She had actually seen the picture a week earlier on WhatsApp when it was sent to her, and had already responded to that image.

Similarly Mrs Uma Prakash, a 35-year-old homemaker, regularly uploads pictures of her eight-year-old son Vidyut showing him playing, going to school, doing his homework etc. Each of these pictures receives responses as comments from her in-laws (sister-in-law, brother-in-law etc.) as well as her own parents, who live next door and see Vidyut every day.

In the case of Krishnan, a 67-year-old retired government telecom officer, the weekly Skype calls that he and his wife have with their son and his family (settled in the US) are the time when family news is shared. Conversations are often structured around their grandchildren, Varsha and Shyla, at school in grades five and four respectively. Sumi, the couple's daughter-in-law, uploads pictures of Varsha and Shyla on Facebook and each time the parents of both Krishnan and Sumi would comment on them – even though these pictures would have already been shared with them and appreciative comments already shared in private.

In societies such as Panchagrami there are several normative discourses related to the ideals of a good and model family. The essentiality of normative ideals within a family needs to be demonstrated openly, rather than being subsumed within the family itself. As in the offline world, where families perform for the outside world to show their closeness and how ideal their family is, Facebook has emerged as an online mass medium where families overtly display their affection, love and bonding for the world – in other words, their larger network – to see. This is also a typical example of scalable sociality; the families strategically

choose both the size and the nature of the group before posting anything related to their families.

While both the older and the younger generation participate in this performance, it is generally the elderly who do so overtly. This is not seen in the lower socio-economic classes, nor in the lower middle classes who live in the villages, as here parents'/grandparents' use of technology and social networking sites is much more limited. However, they do view and express admiration of photographs that their children might show them on their mobile phones. They would see these as photos shown on a mobile phone, however, rather than as material emerging from Facebook or WhatsApp – or any other platform for that matter. The hardware instrument (i.e. the mobile phone or the computer) is what is perceptible to them.

In conclusion, intergenerational communication over media (phone or social media) is multi-layered and strongly influenced by structures of power; these in turn spring from a cultural context with high regard for hierarchy, again driven by principles of respect for age. This does not necessarily mean that such controls over determination of media usage are devoid of care, protection and concern for close family members. Though issues of visibility, normative ideals, conformance to the expectations of a network and even skills influence the choice of one medium of communication over another, there is a convincing display of polymedia in these intergenerational communications at Panchagrami.

Married couples and polymedia

Unlike intergenerational communication, married couples were much more open to communication over text messages, with a balance created between text and voice communication. Their channels of communication were always private, however, and never exposed to the outside world. Couples living together rarely used Facebook to communicate with each other. They always used voice calls, text messages or WhatsApp, which they preferred over other kinds of social media. The media that they selected to communicate share features such as privacy, security and intimacy. The examples discussed below most often are from the middle classes (except for Sri Lakshmi and Karuppiah), rather than lower socio-economic classes, as communication between couples from the latter backgrounds normally takes place by voice or text (if both are educated; if not it is always by voice). Both levels of

education and the cost of access to certain technologies play significant roles in determining communication channels for lower socio-economic classes.

Chandralekha and Ranga

Chandralekha (Chandra) and Ranga work for the same ITES[37] company and had an arranged marriage (managed by their respective families). Once they were married Ranga got himself transferred to the same branch as Chandra. As the company does not allow married couples to work for the same team, Ranga and Chandra work for two different teams, located on different floors. However, they meet for lunch every day and schedule their lunchtime accordingly. As both appreciate that their work schedules are not always fixed, they send messages to each other asking if the other is free for lunch. However, they do not use their phones, or even WhatsApp or Facebook, to communicate this. Such communication takes place through an organisation-wide instant messenger, through which one can send personal messages to another employee to ask for something without calling him or her over the phone. Ranga and Chandra use this facility to communicate with each other, as this does not give their respective bosses the impression that they are talking about personal matters during office hours (Chandra's boss is particularly concerned with this). It is an easy and discreet method of communication, which the couple can use without attracting attention. They do this not only to schedule lunch, but also to fix the right time to stop work for the day, or sometimes even to discuss certain domestic issues.

Aarthi and Akilan

Akilan (aged 31) and Aarthi (30) are a young couple who live in Panchagrami with their five-year-old child. They had an inter-caste marriage, much against their parents' wishes, around eight years ago, since when they have had an estranged relationship with their parents. Time may be said to be a great healer, but it did not seem so in this case. They live as a nuclear family, with only Aarthi's mother[38] and sister visiting her when time permits. Though both work for IT companies they are not on Facebook, believing that other relatives too are unfavourably disposed to their marriage. Since membership on Facebook might connect them with these relatives and prompt embarrassing questions,

they avoid the site. However, they are members of technical (computer- and work-related) social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and other forums and groups. They both own Samsung smartphones and have a post-paid connection (Vodafone) with a CUG (Closed User Group – having only the two of them as a group).

At work the couple tend to communicate with one another over text messages before calling each other. A typical communication that took place on 22 November 2013, a Friday, went something like this:

Aarthi: Sappitacha? (meaning 'Finished lunch?')
Akilan: hmm n U? (meaning: 'Yes and have you finished yours?')
Aarthi: nt yt cll pannalama (meaning: 'Not yet, can I call you now?')
Akilan: Innum 10 mns pannatumma (meaning: 'Can I call you in another 10 mins?')
Aarthi: K (meaning: 'OK')
Akilan: anythng urg (meaning: 'Anything urgent?')
Aarthi: Illa thayir konjam pulikuthu (meaning: 'No, the curd seemed a bit sour') – curd rice is a common lunchtime food in India)
Akilan: hmm theriyum kandukalla avasarama sapttaen (meaning: 'Yes I know, I had to eat in a hurry so didn't worry')
Akilan: Seri 10mns la call pannuraen (meaning: 'OK, I'll call you in 10 mins')
Aarthi: K

As both work for IT companies, they appreciate that they cannot just call, as one of them might be busy, so each will message the other before calling. Their messaging has now migrated to WhatsApp.

Deepa and Vasu

The case of Vasu (aged 37) and Deepa (35), who also had an inter-caste marriage, is similar. Vasu, whom we met in Chapter 2, owns a business and Deepa is a homemaker. As with Akilan and Aarthi, both of their families opposed the marriage. However, the couple has now been married for 10 years and has two children who attend primary school. Both Vasu and Deepa are on Facebook as well as on WhatsApp. Both have Samsung smartphones, while Vasu also uses an iPhone (purchased while on a business trip to Dubai).

When it comes to everyday communication, however, both prefer to call each other or send quick messages on WhatsApp rather than to

use Facebook. Deepa calls Vasu only between 1 pm and 1:30 pm, when he is normally at lunch (he is particular about the time when he eats, as he is in the early stages of a stomach ulcer). So she knows that she can reach Vasu by phone between 1 pm and 1:30 pm; otherwise Deepa texts him and normally waits for him to call her. Their conversations usually centre on daily chores. A conversation that took place through WhatsApp messages between Deepa and Vasu ran as follows:

Deepa: Varumbodhu Milk vanganum (meaning: 'Please can you get some milk on your way home?')
Vasu: Seri (meaning: 'OK')

Another example of their brief WhatsApp conversations is as follows:

Deepa: Madhiyam sonnatha marakathinga (meaning: 'Don't forget what I told you this afternoon')
Vasu: Marakala (meaning: 'haven't forgotten')

Sri Lakshmi and Karuppiah

Sri Lakshmi is a graduate and works for a call centre. Her husband Karuppiah, aged 25, is a driver with a taxi company that runs special services for local IT companies. He dropped out of school but still communicates well in English – a skill he made sure to learn, so that he could communicate with his customers (foreigners and Indians alike). Karuppiah and Sri Lakshmi each own a Samsung smartphone and are avid users of WhatsApp. Karuppiah has a hobby of taking pictures of himself at various locations that he visits during the day; he then sends the images to Sri Lakshmi and a few other friends. He maintains separate channels (a private one just with Lakshmi and a group chat for his friends) to communicate with each of them on WhatsApp. Karuppiah's WhatsApp picture listing shows him standing before IT companies, five-star hotels, university buildings etc. For her part Sri Lakshmi only comments on these pictures during her work time from her workplace through voice messages if she is free or through smiley faces or 'thumbs-up' symbols if she is busy.

If Sri Lakshmi wants Karuppiah to undertake a chore, she normally calls him. If he does not pick up, she understands that he may be busy driving and leaves him a voice message on WhatsApp, either asking him to call back or to do a particular task. In their case sending text messages does not happen: they use either voice messages or visual symbols.

Indra and Arvind

Indra, aged 43, is a homemaker and the mother of two children. Her husband Arvind, aged 45 years, is an entrepreneur who runs a huge showroom for cycles. Although Indra takes care of most of the domestic chores, Arvind chips in at times, specifically when on his way home from work. If he comes across hawkers selling fresh fruits or vegetables next to his workplace, he takes a picture of it and sends it to Indra on WhatsApp, asking for her approval before making a purchase.

The same thing occurs when Indra asks her husband to shop for a particular spice during her busy cooking periods at weekends. Here again, if Arvind forgets or gets confused over the ingredient, he snaps a picture of the spice and sends it to Indra over WhatsApp for approval before he buys it. Indra does the same when buying presents for their mutual friends (for their birthdays and anniversaries, for example), to see if Arvind likes the idea and agrees about the cost. However, communication other than sending pictures for approval happens over the phone and by voice, rather than through any other media.

Vasudha and Mahesh

Vasudha, aged 58, is currently in the US[39] to help her daughter around the birth of her second child. Her husband Mahesh, aged 62, had to remain in India because of his professorial job in a management institute. The couple communicate over the phone every day and via Skype once every two or three days. If the phone rang at 7 am or at 9 pm Indian time, Mahesh knew that it was Vasudha calling.

Vasudha used a VOIP-based phone in the US to call India. Similarly, as she did not have a smartphone in the US, she used her iPad to send emails to Mahesh letting him know a good time to Skype. Initially they did not have a firm schedule for Skype, as they had done with phone calls. As time went on, however, schedules for this also fell into place, and Vasudha's iPad proved very useful in helping her Skype with Mahesh. Calls were made mostly on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays, when Mahesh was also relatively free from his teaching work. Other than a few private conversations, most of their conversations revolved around how to cook a particular dish. Vasudha always made a point of checking with Mahesh that he was eating well, and discovering what dishes he had cooked.

Radhika and Santhanam

Radhika, aged 33, and Santhanam, aged 36, are a couple as well as equal business partners in an entrepreneurial venture. They run a fashion garment showroom as well as a hair salon. Their model of management is not differentiated, i.e. both look after both businesses. While Santhanam is concerned with finance, logistics and operations, Radhika is more involved with marketing, sales and HR. Such segregation of work is not strict, however, and both end up taking care of everything.

The couple has a dedicated Facebook page, but use it more to communicate with their friends than with each other. Most of their communication took place via voice messages as well as normal text messages; Radhika claimed that it was rather a mess, as personal texts got mixed with work-related ones. However, they now have a work group set up with WhatsApp. Personal texts are sent to each other over WhatsApp, while professional texts are sent using a group name, which goes with their company name, thus avoiding confusion.

As witnessed in the case studies, communication between couples tends to show a pattern of intimacy, care and concern – even in conversations that might appear mundane to the outside world. Another subtle pattern that emerges is the negotiations with channels of communication, where they are chosen based on what suits and is convenient for both the parties concerned. While the intergenerational communications reveal a pattern of control, in the case of couples there seems to be a kind of agreed-upon rationale that precedes the choice of media. The choice of platforms to be used is also determined by understanding each partner's time and space rather than just that of whoever was initiating the conversation, as shown in the above cases.

Another subtle pattern emerges in which such cognisance during communication is displayed more by women than men. Although, as specified earlier, platforms offering intimate and secured channels are generally preferred over others, this does not preclude users from demonstrating their intimacy to a larger network of people or the public, as shown in the following cases with regard to one particular platform – Facebook.

Facebook as a performative platform for couples

Facebook acts as a performative platform that allows couples to demonstrate their intimacy to the wider network, just as in filial relationships.

The following cases show that even where couples live together, the performance of their love and adoration for each other was displayed on Facebook. Here, however, it was meant to be a performance that the world could see, rather than being a private communication between them.

Similar to the normative discourses of an ideal family, discourses pertaining to an ideal couple, or an ideal marriage, are taken seriously. With Facebook, such ideal aspects are revealed for the world to see, rather than being subsumed at a family level alone.[40] As in the case of filial relationships, Facebook becomes the platform where such 'global' demonstrations have an impact. The following three case studies give examples of these performances.

Saranya and Srijith

Saranya, aged 24, and Sreejith, 25, fell in love when they worked together in a financial firm. With their respective parents' approval, they married within a year of meeting one another. Saranya, who was active on Facebook, uploaded pictures of herself with Srijith from the start of their courtship. Immediately after her wedding, her profile on Facebook was filled with pictures of the event. After a couple of months, it changed to pictures of the couple going out together. Until this point Srijith had never commented on Saranya's profile, nor was he very active on Facebook. Yet a couple of months after their marriage he started posting messages on Facebook on how much he misses his wife while at work – in reality his workplace was located just one floor below Saranya's work place. Both also posted messages on Facebook saying how much they had enjoyed their dinner at a restaurant the previous day as well as their drive back home in the car.

Chaya and Varun

Similar to Saranya and Srijith's situation is the case of Chaya and Varun (both also in their mid-twenties). In addition to pictures of the holidays they had taken together, notes on how they had enjoyed a particular place together or even eaten an ice cream together would go on their Facebook profiles. Both said they intended such posts to be memories, but these were always followed with a conversation between the couple on Facebook, rather than it being viewed as a space for other people to comment on.

Sandhya and Gopal

Sandhya, aged 23, noted that her husband Gopal, aged 26, had always been a romantic and wished to express his love to her publicly. Sandhya admitted that she had previously been embarrassed, but had got used to it in the process of living with Gopal. Sandhya, an HR executive, travels around the country to recruit human resources for the IT company she works for. Gopal, a software programmer by profession, does not travel much, and remains at home when Sandhya travels. Each time she went on a trip Gopal made a point of putting a romantic song from YouTube, either Tamil (Kollywood)[41] or Hindi (Bollywood),[42] to indicate he was missing his wife. These posts embarrassed Sandhya, but she viewed the fact that her husband loved her so much positively and had become reconciled to them.

Earlier in this chapter we saw day-to-day intimate conversations between couples. In this section we have seen how an enhanced selection of these conversations is showcased to a larger network. At first glance these may appear as a demonstration of intimacy to the outside world, but, as Chaya notes, such posts are also memories of their time together. So these posts could be seen not just as a communication to the outside world, but also as a communication between each other and a strategic accumulation of memories, to refer back to in the future.[43] Though such posts could be initiated by just one of the parties involved, they very soon get the partner's approval and participation, even if he or she is initially embarrassed. This does not necessarily mean that all couples that posted in this way went through the same cycle, however. There were cases in which one of the partners restricted such posts, keeping the couple's intimate moments either to themselves or to a select, strong-tie network.

Communication between siblings

Communication between siblings belonged to a different genre from communication between couples or intergenerational communication. In Panchagrami communication between siblings living with each other was primarily face to face or over the phone. It migrated to Facebook and WhatsApp when one of them married and moved away, especially if one or both of the siblings was female. Siblings supporting each other or each other's children on Facebook were a common sight, especially if one of them was a woman. In other words, the use of Facebook and

WhatsApp as communicative platforms between siblings happened more often in cases of sisters or a sister–brother relationship than it did between brothers.

A clear trend emerged showing that if the age gap between brothers was four years or more, they had separate sets of friends; although both of them might be on Facebook they never friended each other, though they privately communicated over WhatsApp. This was especially clear in the cases of young, unmarried brothers. The situation changed in the cases of brothers who were married with children, however; if they were still on Facebook, the men friended each other. This was especially the case with those from the lower middle classes. However, with upper middle classes the entire family (including the brothers' wives) would also be friends with each other on Facebook. Usually no WhatsApp group was established by brothers from a lower middle-class family, as their wives were not on it. In an upper middle-class family, however, a family WhatsApp group between the brothers' families was a common occurrence; more often than not it was established by the wife of one of the brothers, with support from her in-laws.

However, when it comes to brother–sister relationships, things were very different. Although these men generally perceived Facebook as a potentially dangerous tool for female family members, they differed in their stance when it came to women outside their immediate or extended families. The visibility that the women from their families might have on social media was generally not accepted as a good example of womanhood; it is not considered a normative ideal for a good Tamil, or even an Indian woman.[44] The discourses on ideal womanhood in the context of Indian culture, and the ways in which men always strive to ensure this for female family members are not rare. Such sentiments often reflect the influence of traditional social norms and the principles of certain caste-based political parties to which these men belong.

The situation became very different when sisters married and moved away, however, as in Ravi's case (as discussed in Chapter 2), where his sister initiates calls with her family every week even after marriage. Another example is the case of Ranjith and Sreelatha; after Sreelatha married and settled in Bahrain, she started to use Facebook and became her brother's friend. She pestered Ranjith to upload pictures of her parents on Facebook and to keep changing these every week, so she could see how her parents looked now.

Ranjith always has to be there for Sreelatha to Skype with their parents, as they are not comfortable using the desktop computer

or Skype on it. Skype calls thus take place just once a month, and in between Sreelatha calls her parents rather than seeing them online. As a consequence Sreelatha contacts Ranjith and asks him for pictures of her parents and relatives.

Before Sreelatha was married, Ranjith accepts that he controlled his sister; he was in fact so strict that he would not allow her to access Facebook. He now agrees such behaviour was foolish on his part, observing sadly that only when she moved to Bahrain did he appreciate her value and his love for her. Ranjith also agreed that it was Sreelatha who had friended their long-lost cousins on Facebook and re-built relationships once lost. He admitted that he never once tried reaching out to his extended family, while Sreelatha did so immediately after signing onto Facebook. Ranjith also noted that it was Sreelatha who became Facebook friends with the girl with whom he fell in love. When he had issues with his parents over the relationship, it was his chats with Sreelatha over Facebook that soothed him. Ranjith was shortly to marry this girl, all thanks to Sreelatha who had convinced his parents. He regretted his foolishness in believing his sister to be immature, and now declared that she was in fact more mature than he, despite being over three years younger. Strangely the brother and sister did not communicate over WhatsApp, though both owned smartphones. When this question arose in an interview with Ranjith, he smiled knowingly and said that they would be doing it soon.

Communication between sisters was in a different realm altogether. They did not mind being friends on Facebook, even if there was an age gap, and generally commented on or liked each other's posts and profiles. While particularly personal discussions took place through voice-based calls or texts, or even through WhatsApp, use of Facebook Messenger was also evident in several cases.

In lower socio-economic classes, many young, unmarried women were not allowed access to communication technologies. However, when employed or married (and if educated), they do become significant social networkers, in order to keep communication flowing between family members. This does not necessarily mean that they would use social networking tools/sites, as use of these also depends on who in the women's social circles used them. However, networking through text messages and voice messages certainly occurs.

After having explored patterns of communication within a close family circle, we will now move on to explore communication between extended family members at Panchagrami.

Communication with extended family

Communication with extended family members depended on their offline relationships, as the offline nature of ties[45] (stronger or weaker) influenced the frequency of communication. However, there were several cases where long lost relatives were found on Facebook. In Panchagrami this had even to a certain extent become a hobby for a few upper middle-class elderly people. This was a mixed group that could not be categorised as consisting mainly of men or of women. It seemed as if people of both genders were equally enthusiastic about such projects. They would become members of Facebook and invariably start looking for relatives on the site. Several elderly people were proud of their achievements in finding their second cousin's daughter on Facebook, or even distant relatives from their native village, whom they had last seen decades ago. As Mr Rajaram, a 69-year-old Facebook enthusiast, observed: 'it was like finding someone who got lost in a temple fair.' Geni[46] was another site to which these elderly people thronged, as it helped (automatically) to construct family trees for them.

Several retirees had started writing their family history by going back to the villages they hailed from, and most of them were on Facebook to find points of contact. However, when a point of contact (such as a long-lost relative) was found, the one-to-one relationship transferred to phone conversations, or even WhatsApp, for serious conversations, leaving the hunt for other relatives to continue in the Facebook jungle or carnival (depending on how you view the site). Since WhatsApp has now also taken over text messaging, communication between these extended family members took place on WhatsApp too – sometimes in the form of family group communication and sometimes individually. Once again this depended on the nature of relationship that one maintained offline.

Communication between cousins, specifically married cousins who lived some distance apart, normally took place over Facebook, as this was seen as the medium through which one could catch up with an extended family. Skype calls and phone calls also take place; however, these depend on how much of an offline contact relatives had with one another while growing up. Several instances of cousins liking and commenting on each other's Facebook profiles and albums occurred, and these may substantially increase once they have children. Support for each other's children is extended through likes and comments each time a picture of a cousin's child is uploaded on Facebook. There were cases where groups of cousins organised an event (rather like a festival

at their native village), but this only took place either if the cousins had known each other while growing up or at least if their parents had been close to each other.

Life events such as births, weddings and deaths appeared more visible on Facebook than other day-to-day communication between extended family members. Their visibility was a result of the high response rates (in the forms of likes and comments) that such events elicited from extended family circles on Facebook. Though a child's birth would generally be announced on Facebook, uploading pictures of a newborn baby is postponed until the child is at least a fortnight old or the religious rites associated with birth of a child are completed, for fear of attracting the evil eye – as discussed earlier in this chapter in relation to Mrs Geetha Thiagarajan. Such practices were followed rigidly in families where the elderly had a stronger say in such matters, for instance in the case of Mrs Geetha Thiagarajan discussed above.

There were in fact also cases where pictures of new babies were uploaded within a day, but this depended on how the elderly in the family perceived social media. If the extended family group had strong ties and were members of a common WhatsApp group, such pictures were usually exchanged over WhatsApp rather than on Facebook; somehow the latter, in comparison to WhatsApp, was seen as a mass media unsuitable for certain communication. Even when such pictures were shared over WhatsApp, none of the relatives in the group uploaded those pictures on Facebook. Instead they waited for the baby's parents or someone in the immediate family to upload these onto the site. There seemed to be an accepted ethos within such family circles with regard to certain forms of communication (in this case visual) transitioning from one platform to another. This does not necessarily mean that news of the new baby's arrival is kept within family circles, but rather that, even if such communication moves out of these networks, they are only in textual or oral form. What emerged was evidence of strategising not only the platforms to communicate such messages, but also which parts of communication should appear on different platforms.

Invitations to children's birthday parties were also sent over Facebook. Though this was generally acceptable, in other cases – such as that of Mr Raghavan, discussed earlier in this chapter – invitations over social media were construed as being impolite; only personal phone calls were acceptable. Only a few birthday pictures were sent over WhatsApp, with most being uploaded on Facebook for all of their networks to see, although the intention is to target the extended family members. Response rates in the form of comments were evident in

the first few pictures (generally the first 12 to 15 or so) compared to others in the album. The only exceptions were portfolio pictures of the child and the parents, or those in which the child cuts the cake. These were an expected social norm that extended family members had to satisfy in close-knit families. Once again, there was a certain level of performance by the extended family to highlight the closeness that they maintained with a specific group to more distant relatives in their social circles.[47]

Weddings were another important life event made apparent by changes in a couple's profiles. The first change would occur in their relationship status and the next would be in their photo albums, where visuals of the engagement ceremony would be uploaded, eliciting several positive responses. Pictures of the wedding ceremony itself would be uploaded in two cycles, the first cycle consisting of a handful of pictures uploaded immediately after the wedding and specifically meant for those extended family members who live abroad and might have missed the event. The next cycle, with a full album, would be uploaded almost a month after the wedding.

It is almost an expected norm that people within India would attend the wedding. A few pictures from the wedding ceremony would be uploaded by those attending the ceremony, for example cousins, aunts or uncles of the bride or bridegroom, in order to give their non-attending relatives a sense of being present at the event through live updates. Such images might be sent over Facebook or WhatsApp. As noted above, either the bride or the bridegroom would upload the entire album of professional wedding pictures taken by the photographer onto their Facebook profiles around a month after the event. This time period was generally accepted within the extended family circles, although pictures and gossip from the ceremony would circulate on WhatsApp during this period of time. In a couple of cases, both from upper middle-class families, an engagement ceremony was streamed live on Skype and other professional streaming channels[48] for members of the extended family unable to attend the ceremony. However, all of this depended on the closeness that the extended family members on either side shared with the couples' families.

What was more apparent was the communication of the deaths of elderly relatives on the profiles of middle-aged informants. Posts on deaths attracted a lot more responses than those of other genres. This might in part be because several visuals of other ceremonies were uploaded onto Facebook, whereas news of a death was generally accompanied by just one or two pictures, and so responses had to be centred

on these posts alone. A couple of distinct patterns were observed on such posts. Either the extended family would all group together on the Facebook comment section of the user who posted the news (normally one of the children) and express condolences; or, if the deceased was well known in their family circles, several members of the extended family would repeat such memorialising posts on their profiles, thus symbolically expressing their mourning. Condolences are also expressed on the family WhatsApp group.

While there might just be a general update on the time of cremation on Facebook, a more periodic update on such activities appears on the WhatsApp family groups. Selfies with the dead body were generally not encouraged and in a few cases middle-class families had even stopped people from taking pictures of the death ceremony, since they felt it was inappropriate to elicit likes on Facebook for such posts.

The use of social networking tools within family circles (those related by blood or marriage) were discussed above. However, as we saw in the case of Govindan, kinship relationships at Panchagrami extend to friendship circles in the form of fictive kin. As exploring the use of social networking tools within kinship circles is the primary focus of this chapter, the next section deals with those friendship relationships that may be classified as 'fictive kin'.

Facebook and fictive kinship

While communication between friends at Panchagrami is a significant relationship that needs consideration, this section concentrates on a form of intimate friendship that becomes a relationship of fictive kin. It is important to recognise that not all kinship relationships are as intimate as certain friendships, and nor does fictive kinship necessarily translate to an intimate relationship.[49] Some common terms that signify such fictive kinship are used in everyday parlance even between strangers, for example *'Anna'* (older brother), *'Akka'* (older sister), *'Amma'* (mother) and so on. Just because one person addresses the other in such terms, it does not necessarily mean any kind of close relationship, or even friendship of any sort. While tradition in Tamil Nadu is to refer to even strangers in these kin terms, the use of non-kin terms such as 'Sir' and 'Madam/Mam' also occurs. The case of Govindan, discussed at the start of this chapter, is a typical example of this kind of fictive kin vs. non-kin segregation. However, this section is concerned only with those intimate friendships[50] in which fictive kinship terms are used to address each other.

Understanding the relationships that develop in a certain area dominated by a certain caste is essential in understanding how kin become friends who once again become kin through fictive kinship associations. Take the case of the particular 120-year-old village mentioned earlier in the chapter, one that is a part of Panchagrami and dominated by a caste that has been particularly unfortunately discriminated against historically. Several youngsters in this particular village are vaguely aware that almost the entire village (specifically its long-term residents) was related at some point in the past. However, more confusion arose with the recent conversion to Christianity (though their religions have changed, their caste groups remain the same) and also with a polygyny practised by the older generation. As a result, few know what relationship they share with a neighbour. Apart from a few youngsters, not many can trace relationships. Other youngsters of their particular age group would normally be seen as friends. However, there is a particular system through which everyone addresses each other with a kin term, thus relating to the other as a friend and not as a relative. So the village inhabitants would address each other as brother ('older brother') or 'uncle' or 'brother-in-law', or even as 'co-brother'. The same more or less applies to female friends too. In cases such as this, a parabolic curve of kinship–friendship–fictive kinship exists. Actual forgotten kinship relationships are seen as friendships (in order to mediate confusion) and expressed in terms of fictive kinships. The reason this is discussed is because these are the kin terms with which these people address one another on Facebook, and it has to be understood in order to appreciate them as a social group. A few more examples of fictive kinship as expressed at Panchagrami help to present this kind of relationship more clearly.

Sridhar, aged 26, has been actively involved in the politics of a local caste-based party. Since he helps local young people, he has always been referred to as 'Annan' ('older brother'). Following a command by his local party leader to develop a more aggressive activism and membership drive,[51] Sridhar adopted a mechanism to attract secondary-school boys of his caste from the village into his party through social media. When they meet Sridhar offline these secondary-school students address him as '*Annan*'; even when they address him on Facebook, he is always referred to as '*Annan*'.

Prakash, a 21-year-old college student who lives in Panchagrami, is pretty well known among his neighbourhood peer group of men. His fame comes from his ability to have friended around 30 women (actually strangers) from other Indian states on Facebook. He used to be referred to by his peer group as '*machi*' (brother-in-law), but once they

saw his mastery in friending strangers (particularly women) as friends on Facebook, and his willingness to help his group in doing the same, peers began to refer to him jovially as '*mama*' (which normally means uncle, but is also a slang Tamil term meaning a pimp). Though the peer groups only chat with each other on WhatsApp, the pictures they upload on Facebook always refer (or are tagged) to Prakash as '*mama*'. Although he is in a way a distant uncle to some of his Facebook friends, this is generally forgotten, as the reasons why and how he is actually their uncle are not known. The friendship here extends to fictive kinship, and the group members relate to each other through these terms. As noted some of them are actually related, and may on occasion refer to each other as *pangali* ('co-brother'). However, *mama* seems a far more common term of address for Prakash on social media, as well as in face-to-face conversations offline.

This specific idea of fictive kinship transcends class and caste in Tamil Nadu. However, at Panchagrami, this was much more evident in lower socio-economic classes than it was in the middle class or upper middle class, at least on Facebook. But this is not to say that such fictive kinship is not expressed on Facebook by the middle classes. The difference is the frequency. Birthday/anniversary messages expressing such fictive kinship relationships appear on the timelines of a few middle-class informants. For instance Sunithra, aged 23, writes birthday messages on her Facebook friends' profiles, in which she expresses a fictive kinship relationship.

> *To my sweetest brother, we grew up together and celebrated each other. Here you go with one more. Happy Birthday!*

Though this message from Sunithra appears to be addressed to her actual brother, it is in reality addressed to her close friend, who grew up in the same neighbourhood with her. Another example is the case of Bhaarathi, whose response to a comment to her picture on Facebook from her mother's friend was as follows:

Mother's friend: '*Nice dress Bhaarathi kutty,*[52] *look so beautiful*'
Bhaarathi's response: '*Thanks Aunty. Got this at Express Avenue last week. Amma's*[53] *gift*'

Messages such as these do appear from time to time on several residents' Facebook timelines. Several of them are event-based (especially birthdays or anniversaries).

Posts expressing such fictive kinship relationships appear on the Facebook profiles of lower socio-economic class informants on a daily basis. They are not necessarily event-based, but rather an everyday occurrence. In lower socio-economic classes it is more usually men who post such messages, but in the middle classes it is much more in evidence among women.

A reverse system of fictive kinship also occurs in the middle classes, but is nearly absent in lower socio-economic classes. In this case an actual relative might sometimes be referred to as a friend. It happens particularly in cases of kinship relationships arising from marriage, producing relationship such as sister-in-law, co-sister, brother-in-law and so on. The messages are often event-based; when women write birthday messages, for example, they frequently express such relationships as friendships. For example Saraswathi, a 42-year-old homemaker, received an anniversary message from her sister-in-law that went something like this:

> *'To my Anna and my dearest friend Saras, may God bless you on this wonderful day. Wishing you many more such beautiful days.'*

Messages such as this appear on the timelines of many middle-class informants. However, messages that express both kinship relationships and friendships overtly are also evident on Facebook timelines. For example Abhinaya, a 25-year-old IT employee, posted the following message on Facebook to celebrate her aunt's birthday:

> *'Happy Birthday to my dearest Chithi,*[54] *my all time bestest friend'*

In a Tamil society notions of hierarchy govern intergenerational relationships such as those between aunt and niece, or even relationships in the same generation, for instance between sisters-in-law. However, the idea of being friends, as expressed in the above two examples, showcases to the outside world that their relationship is one of equals, based upon a free flow of thoughts rather than ones dictated by hierarchy.

This is not to imply that men do not post such messages. Their messages are similar to those that Abhinaya posts, expressing both the actual relationship and the idealistic relationship that they share with the person. For example on his birthday Sarvesh, a 32-year-old IT professional, had messages such as these on his timeline:

> *'To my kutty thambi*[55] *. . . my life advisor, my friend, Happy B'day da!'*
> *'My fav cousin, my 4 am friend, philosopher, guide, wishing u a sooper b'day!'*

Sometimes messages such as these clearly state the relationship that this person has with others in his friendship circle on Facebook. But look again at the first birthday message to Sarvesh: though it gives the impression that it was a message expressing kinship and friendship at the same time, it was in reality a message from a sister-like friend of Sarvesh's. It was not a message from a real relative. The second message, by contrast, is a message from an actual cousin. Unfortunately Sarvesh just knows that they are somehow related; he cannot map out how they are related as cousins, so uses 'cousin' as a generic term of reference.

While the frequency of such expressions differs by gender and class, this constant reshuffling of friendship to fictive kinship and kinship to friendship happens often. One reason for it might be the constantly nudging normative idea that comes from Tamil cinema, and the distribution of moralising memes saying how friendship is far more important to people than kinship.[56] These idealistic discourses on friendships encourage people to treat friendships as analogous to close kinship relationships, and vice versa. Significantly, however, in the lower socio-economic classes all friendships appear as fictive kinships, whereas middle-class posts have a tendency to express kinship as a friendship rather than as kinship.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the idea of relationships and intimacy through kinship relationships. Kinship, a significant aspect of anthropology, is also fundamental to the social structures of Panchagrami, influencing not just everyday offline relationships, but also relationships on social media.

This chapter started with an exploration of intergenerational relationships. Here principles of age and the hierarchy of kinship exerted power and influence, ensuring that the choice of communication channels for intergenerational communication within a family was made only within an array of media determined appropriate by the elderly. Such influence on the choice of media was multi-layered, and had to be understood in the cultural context where such firm media attributions existed.

It was evident that in intra-family communication (specifically that of parent and child) communication by voice more or less dominated other forms due to issues of concern and care. For example Lakshmi, the young mother whom we met in Chapter 2, was not able to talk to her children from her workplace, yet she still recorded voice messages and

sent these over WhatsApp to be played to her children. However, one cannot disregard influential variables such as literacy and other skills, as these also played a role in lower socio-economic class families choosing to communicate by voice rather than other forms of communication. Stronger patterns, which support the theories of polymedia and media-multiplexity, existed in middle-class and upper middle-class families where the elderly could afford to choose multiple communicative media. However, even while other factors, such as physical distance, influence the choice of communicative media, when it came to intergenerational relationships all classes generally preferred voice communication to other forms of communication.

In the case of extended family relationships normative ideals, conformity to network expectations and visibility play significant roles in determining the levels of performance that a family might put up on social media platforms such as Facebook, so that the world (a wider network of ready audience) can witness their closeness as a family. This was also becoming apparent on WhatsApp groups of extended family members, where a few close-knit family members performed for the others.

When it came to everyday communication between married couples, secure private channels such as text messages and WhatsApp alternated with voice-based communication. This could also be since the frequency of communication between married couples was much higher than intergenerational communication. A sense of mutual understanding was evident in the partners' choice of the best way to communicate, selecting from an appropriate array of media. This was also influenced by the general cognisance of the time and space occupied by the other partner, and awareness of what media were available to them.

While there were cases where visibility and the normative ideals of a married couple influenced performance in such relationships, their rationalisation of such performance as a strategic accumulation of memories for the future is worthy of note. Though such overt posts of communication between married couples do take place on Facebook, displayed for a wider network to see, they were strategic, seeking to portray only those contributing to the ideal. Meanwhile the supposedly mundane everyday communication took place privately on WhatsApp or through text messages.

The chapter has also explored relationships with siblings across the social classes. When this is correlated with the earlier discussion of gender and communicative media, it becomes clear that while for the middle classes (more so in the upper middle classes, where women are allowed to use social media), sibling bonding can happen even when

women are single, in the lower socio-economic classes (and in the lower middle classes) this presents a challenge. Younger, unmarried women from these backgrounds are not allowed access to primary communicative media, and thus are restricted from the use of social media. Sibling bonding over social media for this class thus only happens after the women are married or enter employment, when they are able to have their own phones. In sibling relationships that involved a sister, communication seemed to occur with a higher frequency, irrespective of the social class.

Finally this chapter moved to view friendships from the point of view of fictive kinships, as kinship was the primary focus of this chapter. A significant aspect of this was the ways in which fictive kinship and friendships alternated with each other across classes, and how they find themselves expressed on Facebook. While those from lower socio-economic classes viewed all friendships in their area as fictive kinships, the middle class alternated between actual kinship, fictive kinship and friendship – sometimes viewing and expressing actual kinship as friendship and vice versa. It was apparent that at times, when the nature of relationships was more fluid, there was a tendency to move in a parabolic curve from kinship to friendship to fictive kinship.

Also apparent in these examples was a neat case of polymedia, where communication within certain relationships transitioned between platforms. In Chapter 3 we saw visual communication conforming to network expectations. In this chapter we observed that even the apparent use of multiple platforms, and the nature of communication over platforms themselves, are centred on the expectations of the network that one maintains. Also significant were the perceived notions of Facebook as a mass media meant for external communication and WhatsApp as a more private platform. Another layer of division as public and private emerged even within WhatsApp, based on the social circles maintained on it. While certain WhatsApp groups are therefore treated as public, as on Facebook, others are treated as private. Also apparent from family communications is a clear strategic pattern of transaction, oriented towards different networks on WhatsApp conforming to their expectations.

Within the kinds of communication that occur between various kinship relationships across classes, there exists an inherent sense of belonging to a much larger social group. This may be the younger generation, negotiating their own media preferences in contrast to those of older family members or parents. Restrictions may be imposed by this group, who sincerely believe that their motivations are just to

protect and secure the best interests of their daughters by telephoning them; even brothers who do not allow their sisters access to certain media would claim concern for their safety. Another aspect of communication between groups is the complex, parabolic curve of kinship, friendship and fictive kinship. By alluding to the concerns of maintaining an ideal family, in a way users actually conform to the ideals and expectations of the much larger social group in which they are embedded. The study of kinship, and communication of different relationships on social media, is thus a reflection of a much larger society.

5

Bringing home to work: the role of social media in blurring work–non-work boundaries

It's around 3 pm on a Tuesday. Abhijit, a 27-year-old computer code tester, is working in his cubicle, testing a code that needs to be submitted later that evening for processing. He hails from Palghat (Kerala) but works for a large IT company that has its development centre in Panchagrami. He also lives in the area, having moved away from his family in Kerala for employment. Suddenly he is interrupted by a text message from his mother, asking him to visit them at Palghat this weekend to see his potential bride's family. Abhijit, like several other young people of his age, is in the long, drawn-out process of having an arranged marriage.[1] Looking at the message, he walks away from his cubicle into the hallway and calls his mother to ensure that he fully understands the purpose of the visit. He agrees to travel that weekend and returns to his cubicle. He then logs into the Indian railways website from his smartphone and books a ticket for travel that Friday evening. Abhijit then browses his WhatsApp image folder to see the pictures of his potential bride, which his sister had downloaded from her Facebook profile and forwarded to him that morning. He smiles to himself and goes back to working on the code that he was testing.

It's around 5:30 pm on a Friday. Kavitha, a 37-year-old senior director of human resources for a financial data processing company in Panchagrami, leaves a crisp WhatsApp voice message in Tamil: 'don't cook dinner tonight…we are going out for dinner.' In reply she gets a voice message (in Tamil) from a woman: 'OK…will get the kids ready.' A mother of three school-age children, Kavitha takes pride in shuffling effectively between work and home. She and her husband Rajesh (an entrepreneur) now have a stay-at-home cook-cum-childminder (a woman

aged around 50, of Kavitha's family's caste) to undertake domestic tasks, as both Kavitha and her husband work long hours. They decided shortly after the death of Rajesh's mother that they needed someone at home to take care of their children and at the same time help them with cooking.

In order to bring this domestic help over to their way of doing things, Kavitha bought her a cheap Samsung smartphone. Although their communication started with phone calls, the women gradually moved on to communicating over WhatsApp. Kavitha very soon discovered that her childminder was more comfortable with voice messages rather than texts on WhatsApp. So, normally on weekdays between 5 and 5:30 pm, Kavitha ensures that she instructs her childminder on plans for dinner and checks on replenishment of provisions and groceries. This almost ritualistic process takes place over WhatsApp voice messages before Kavitha leaves work at around 7 pm.

These two examples are typical of the way in which people at Panchagrami communicate between work and home. While modern companies try to maintain a strict, formal boundary between the spaces of work and non-work, the demarcation illustrated in the cases of Abhijit and Kavitha tends to be continuously undermined by social media.

In Chapter 1 the field site 'Panchagrami' was introduced as a deliberate choice of a rather extreme example of the massive transformations of modern India – representing as it does the juxtaposition of an IT zone in the midst of rural villages. While this area looks like a case of dealing with contemporary modern India, it is still very recognisably traditional. As such the details of social media are immersed in issues of kinship, class and caste. Nevertheless, the rise of the IT sector brings certain issues into the foreground, one of which is clearly the relationship between work and the other elements of people's lives.

In contrast to agriculture, IT work is a largely formal and professional domain that is clearly designated as work. This obviously represents a challenge to the more informal and complex blend of other kinds of relationships that we have discussed so far. As a result this chapter is largely devoted to this question of what happens to social media when we see this massive presence of a formal, work-based structure right in the middle of our field site. Although there is an awareness of how work and non-work boundaries can shift both ways (you can take tasks out of the office to work on them from home, and you can bring non-work aspects of your life into work), this chapter specifically focuses on how non-work aspects are brought to work through social media. In other words, home is brought to work, ensuring the blurring of the rigid work–non-work boundaries in modern work settings.

In order to show this effectively, we start this chapter by exploring the idea of work as defined by anthropology, before moving on to considering work in India from a historical context. We will then move on to the IT sector's work culture and explore how social media fits into it, illustrated by several case studies from Panchagrami. These case studies will also show how personal communication technologies frequently undermine the strict boundaries of work and non-work.

Work – the anthropological view

The concept of 'work' has been explored by the social sciences in great detail, and anthropology is no exception.[2] Though initially concerned with less formal work such as agricultural labour, anthropology has since then moved on to consider formal, modern industrial work settings.[3] However, whereas other social sciences tend to treat work in dichotomous terms, such as work vs. non-work or formal vs. informal work, anthropology tends to view work as a continuum; though it appreciates the relative conceptualisation of work in binary terms of work and non-work, it recognises that in practice such dualistic framing of work may not hold ground. Anthropology begins by differentiating not work itself, but rather the spheres or domains of life in which work is performed, acknowledging that these spheres overlap and are very culture-specific.[4] Anthropology, like sociology or psychology, views work not only in relation to economics; it gives equal importance to the social aspects of work and the relationships between them[5] as well.

Anthropology also differs from other social sciences in its approach to the study of work. While social sciences such as psychology, sociology and economics tend to approach the concept of work from the standpoint of an individual, a group and an organisation respectively, anthropology strives to understand work in a holistic fashion.[6] The works of several anthropologists on formalised industrial work settings stand as evidence for this approach.[7]

While alongside other social sciences anthropology acknowledges that work may be regarded as a dichotomous variable (work vs. non-work), this must still be seen within the wider social contexts and with variable understandings of space and time.[8] What is important to recognise is the fact that anthropologists have historically worked in areas where such dichotomous practices of work do not exist; now they acknowledge the context of formalised modern industrial settings,

which tend to emphasise and use the widespread dichotomous model of work vs. non-work, or work vs. home,[9] to define the rigid separation between work and domestic realms. Anthropological studies do recognise that innovations[10] such as digital personal communication technologies have blurred this dichotomy and undermined a rigid separation of professional and domestic spheres.

Modern workplaces in India – specifically the IT companies, which work as knowledge outsourcing development centres – are modelled on a Western understanding of workspace; they strive hard to enforce such dichotomies, which are actually distant from more traditional forms of work in India. For example, in the case of the vast textile manufacturing industry, which had been organised largely by caste, activities such as spinning, weaving and dyeing did not necessarily mean being away from family or home; historically such dichotomies had never existed.[11] However, with large-scale industrialisation, and the subsequent establishment of formal factories and office spaces, dichotomies such as these are now becoming apparent.[12] This chapter deals with how people mediate and negotiate the dichotomies that exist in modern work environments using digital personal communication devices, and how in doing so they pose constant challenges to such boundaries.

Before focusing on the manner in which social media disrupts the boundaries of formal work, however, we need to acknowledge the labour system in India more generally. This will help us to appreciate the fact that mediating such structures is nothing new; people have done this historically for centuries. This will also help us to understand how formal labour systems in Panchagrami have apparent contradictions with respect to work-centric policies.

Work, caste and kinship – a historical view from India

Anthropology recognises that people work in a variety of spheres. Formal work is just one such sphere, existing alongside others such as domestic labour, education at school etc. This idea is also central to feminist literature,[13] which has always argued that the work of a homemaker (traditionally a woman) is as important as that of a breadwinner (traditionally a man). The yardstick of direct economic benefit being applied to what is productive and non-productive work, or what defines work itself, is reversed in such literatures. This also leads to an assertion that work related to one space or another assumes importance by the nature of

work (in non-economic terms), rather than by the space in which such work is carried out.

The idea of control in making one space more formal than another seems to have been in place long before industrialisation; it can even be traced back to the time of royalty in India.[14] However, such a concept was immensely strengthened across class and caste with the advent of industrialisation.[15] Formality lay not only in the separation of space, but also in imposing sanctioned social conduct required of all those who occupied this space according to their role, itself dependent on several factors such as hierarchy, ownership, position etc. For example a head-teacher vs. a teacher vs. a student, or a CEO vs. a manager vs. a security guard. This kind of formalisation is similar to the ways in which one's position in kinship determines the proper behaviour of people in relation to each other, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Given that Panchagrami is situated in Tamil Nadu, the concept of work in both Tamil Nadu and in India more widely needs to be understood. Continuity and change is a cliché that can be applied to India,[16] and can certainly be extended to encompass the concept of work in India. The earlier structure of work in India was based on the division of labour by caste hierarchies. In this system particular caste groups performed work believed to have been ordained to them in the Hindu *Shastras*. This was called the *Varnashrama* system, which refers back to the division of the population into four groups by religious authorities. These were based on the work they performed, namely priests, warriors, traders and menials. Understood in terms of its legitimating cosmology, this *Varnashrama* system then underwent changes. It broke into a multitude of differentiated castes where one's occupation, and thus social status, was ordained by birth to belong to a certain caste (ascription-based), in contrast to the vocation that one chose to perform in society.[17]

Caste has remained significant, and many specialist traditional occupations, from potters and goldsmiths to barbers and washer-men, were largely tied to the castes designated to do that work – a situation as true for Tamil Nadu as for the whole of India.[18] Work was also viewed as a transactional service between different castes.[19] The association of specialist traditional occupations with certain caste groups was also true for the wider spheres of manufacturing; the weavers of silk sarees in Kanchipuram district, for example (where the field site is also located) belong only to specific caste groups such as Mudaliars/Chettiars.[20] In Tiruppur, a major textile production hub in Tamil Nadu, the Vanniyars and Vellala Gounders castes[21] are employed in this sector.[22]

Historically, work in India was performed in an environment of family, kin or caste, which did not consider the spheres of work and home as being mutually exclusive or dichotomous in nature. This is very much evident even in contemporary Tamil Nadu.[23] For example, in the organisation of textile production, fabric might first be given to a certain group of people for spinning within their own homes and later to another group of people for weaving within their own homes.[24] Further the Hindu Undivided Family[25]-based law is also based on this model of a joint or extended family system, which extends to property and rights over work.

The industrial revolution and period of colonial rule in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had an early impact on industrialising manufacturing sectors. Iron and steel plants and mines that were established in the earlier part of the twentieth century also gradually started to set up India's industrial infrastructure.[26] In this process a separation of work and home arose.[27] Anthropological studies[28] of work in the Chota Nagpur area[29] in the east of India conclude that though people migrated towards these industrial settings, leaving work based on the structures of family, kin or caste, they seemed to help members of their family, kin and caste to find work in the same factory and migrate into the area as well, and so re-established ties apparently left behind.[30]

Anthropological studies[31] on Tiruppur garment factory workers or on factory workers from the Chota Nagpur area specifically note the social relations developed in spaces of formalised, wage-related labour. They specifically focus on how people bring their social relationships (for example caste in terms of garment factory workers in Tiruppur and relatives and kin from their native villages in Chota Nagpur) into work. A similar observation has been made in a study[32] of Izhavas in Kerala. Here the migration of a caste member to the Middle East (specifically the UAE) helps other kin groups and caste members to move there as well, thus re-establishing kinship and family ties.

Therefore, though systems of rigid separation of work from home have arisen in modern industrial work settings, it is pretty evident that these have always been compromised in the Indian context by kinship and caste. However, one also needs to realise that earlier, caste-based networks were also based on collective origins from a specific geographic region, where people were of the same religion and the same caste. Though they might not have been related to one another, they mostly knew each other through descriptive fictive-kinship terms; in some ways all of this followed from the idiom of a kin-based society. This starts to change following rural urban migration, however, as

people recognise the way in which the same caste cuts across to other religions (Muslims, Christians and Hindus). Caste is fast becoming an aspect of cultural separation rather than hierarchical rank,[33] even as it is overlaid by the idiom of class inequality in contemporary India.[34] Networks based largely on caste still do exist, but they are increasingly becoming just one part of a very complex and ambiguous framework of competing orders and categories within modern work settings. These may in turn expand to more specific groups such as trade unions.[35]

Though systems of rigid separation of work from home arose in modern industrial work settings, as noted above, it is apparent that mediating such dichotomous environments (home vs. work) was far more evident in unskilled, wage-related work[36] existing outside and inside industries rather than in salaried management. It does exist in the management ranks as well, however, as certain perks come with hierarchy and status within a factory. Nevertheless, their position within the management ranks also adds greatly to being visible when they perform such mediating activities, and may result in their being accused of nepotism. However, for low-wage workers the idea of nepotism does not exist; factories face a high turnover of staff and so recruitment with the help of networks might be the most effective way to manage this turnover.

However, what also needs to be recognised is that historically in India not all work was related to one physical space. There was a putting-out system,[37] in which an industrial process is not contained within the confines of one single physical space but rather goes through several stages of processing. Each of these could take place in a different physical space, such as a worker's home.

Though this entire process of mediating the work–non-work boundary inside a factory system may appear to be an effort from the labour force itself, in a way the factories themselves enable such mediations to happen. There exists what can be described as a *system paradox cycle* in all of this. The factories (or, more accurately, the factory system of work) try very hard to establish a rigid separation between work and non-work. Yet at the same time, in order to recruit lower-wage workers into the factory system, they encourage employees to recommend and assist in recruiting other workers. The employees for their part recruit members of their families or groups based upon kin or caste, favouring such applicants over others. In a way this acts as a catalyst for non-work related informal communication within formal workspaces. It leads to the creation of a non-work environment at work, undermining the formality of the workspace itself. Even as the work system adapts to what has been traditionally followed in India, however, the formal

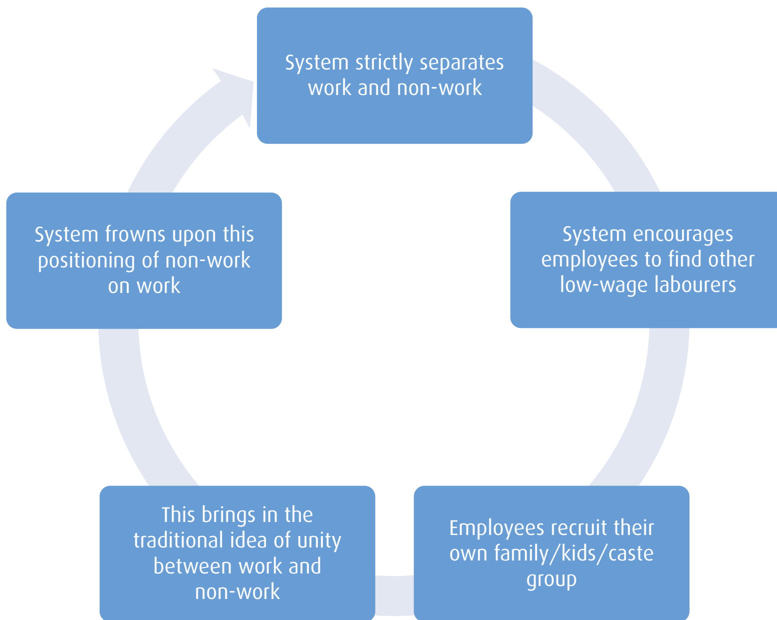


Fig. 5.1 Work system paradox

work system tends to frown upon this arrangement and in turn imposes stricter regulations.

The illustration above shows this cyclical paradox (Fig. 5.1).

The emergence of a paradox cycle within this kind of work system did not occur in the manufacturing sector alone. It also exists, as we will see, in the work systems of knowledge processing industries such as IT; but this time in relation to social media and personal digital communication technologies.

IT work culture

Before we move on to examining how social media and personal communication technologies help mediate structures within this sector, it might help to look more deeply into India's IT sector. In so doing we can better appreciate the role played by such personal communication technologies in blurring boundaries of work and non-work in people's lives.

After the liberalisation of India's economy in 1991, the country's presence in the IT/ITES[38] sector grew pretty steadily.[39] Its expansion

in this sector, along with the tests of nuclear capability and the political situation after 1991, projected the Indian economy as a knowledge economy.[40] Entering into this sector was considered a significant national status symbol. It enabled people to build symbolic capital[41] through investment in education capital and encouraged aspirations of social mobility.[42] The growth of the IT/ITES sector, symbolic of such an economy, also resulted in the recruitment of highly skilled knowledge workers to help international and transnational clients.[43] While such recruitment processes are said to be based on merit, with an individual's education and skills being given preference over matters of kinship, family and caste, the true level of meritocracy is questionable.[44] As research[45] shows, however, while the IT/ITES industry accepts recommendations, it still considers certain skills, such as knowledge of English, computer programming and others, to be essential and basic. The industry recognises that its future is based on highly skilled workers, and thus restricts the introduction of family members and those from the same kin and caste groups that we saw among unskilled workers in the Chota Nagpur region. Further research[46] clearly points out the limitations of kin-based labour recruitment in textile industries.

However, one needs to remember that IT/ITES does not only encompass employees involved with programming, business process outsourcing (BPO), knowledge process outsourcing (KPO) or call centres. The industry is much larger than these divisions. It also employs a support system of cleaning/floor staff, canteen and café employees, drivers, electricians, security personnel and so on in the lower pay grades, as well as consultants and HR and operations personnel in middle and senior level positions. The lower pay grades do not necessarily require knowledge of programming, a perfect vocabulary or the right English accent. Therefore, in these lower cadres of employment within the IT field, recommendations based on kin or family connections can still take place. Once again, however, critical deconstruction needs to be performed to see how these work in a formalised environment.[47] Further, the turnover in IT/ITES is also relatively high, ensuring no permanence in the network ties of kin, caste or family within a single workplace.[48]

The work culture shared by most of the IT/ITES firms in India is unique. It has been credited with increasing the relative value of professional workers, and also with attracting more female employees by projecting a 'gender neutral' image.[49] On the other hand, research has also highlighted that the phenomenon of body shopping[50] has forced employees to be always on their toes, with companies encouraging them to be always connected to the workplace. Another aspect of the Indian

IT/ITES industry is its unique network culture. With the advent of official networking sites, people are always connected to their workplaces. This correlates with the idea of networked organisation culture[51] that might be true of the Indian IT work culture, as many of these companies have modelled their workplaces on the firms of clients in the US.

The expectations of satisfying Western clients and modelling their work culture in terms of international and transnational clients have ensured a rigid demarcation of work and home spheres in the IT/ITES environment.[52] Further, one of the biggest gaps in the study of Indian industrial labour has been the seriousness with which kinship–social relationships in the workplace and social relationships in the wider urban neighbourhood are analysed.[53] For anyone who needs to understand work systems in the Indian IT/ITES industry, the general relationships of kinship, social relationships in the workplace and the relationships of IT/ITES employees in their wider neighbourhood will all play a significant role.

As a part of exploring social media's fit into this work culture, and its role in helping to mediate work–non work boundaries, it is useful to consider why IT companies place certain restrictions on the use of social media, and how employees constantly bypass them.

Bypassing restrictions

The last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first were crucial years for the emerging IT industry. Several studies of this time, in which the industry sought to find a strong foothold in India, describe the evolution of the country's IT industry and the work culture it promoted.[54] By serving a North American/European clientele, these business/knowledge process-outsourcing[55] industries adopted English as their lingua franca. They also assumed a dress code of business formalwear to emphasise their professionalism to a discerning clientele, who in turn sent senior staff to sign partnership deals in Indian offices.[56] This process also required adopting a culture geared to showcasing a higher degree of professionalism, in contrast to the earlier factory systems. The shop floors where manual skilled and unskilled labourers worked now became cubicles for a well-educated, technically skilled and English-speaking workforce. In general traditional factories were not obliged to display their workplaces for approval to individual clients. However clients in the IT sector, concerned with issues such as data privacy and security, sought to inspect the setup

of Indian knowledge processing industries. In so doing an ever-curious and cautious clientele ensured that these industries maintained high standards.

Yet such developments were also part of an evolving process. The adoption of a Western work culture and workspace concepts (such as general and data security systems, the cubicle system in larger companies and flexible work stations in small, entrepreneur-led start-ups that had to keep costs down) helped to allay the anxieties of their clients. This in turn had an effect on other aspects including dress codes, which gradually evolved to 'business casual' instead of formal dress,[57] a 'dress-down Friday' culture and the provision of weekends off work. Other features such as an office gym, snooker tables and table tennis facilities, and a kitchenette as well as food courts and canteens, were adopted specifically in this sector – both to attract educated Indian youth and to reflect the culture of their global clientele in their own business environment. (This adoption is not yet complete, however; in many companies it remains a work in progress.) With all of this in place, India's IT companies still required a rigid separation between work and non-work spheres. Though modern practices allowed employees access to work systems outside the office space (by taking laptops home), bringing non-work aspects into work was still disapproved of by most companies.

Sharath, a 47-year-old sales director of digital healthcare products, worked for a multinational IT company and was formally dressed. He claimed that earlier (about a decade ago) a culture had existed in which working hours needed to be exactly measured and quantified, in order to charge up to the clients. This naturally led to dislike of any non-work-related communication as the amount of employee time that could be charged was reduced. Although such an attitude seems to have decreased in the past few years, such a culture still exists in a few companies.

Keshav, aged 34, is Sharath's teammate and reports directly to him. An engineer and team leader, he related an incident that occurred a few years ago, when a client from the US had visited their team. During the client's project audit visit, he had encountered members of Keshav's team handling smartphones at their desks. This client had questioned a member of the team about the camera functionality of the phone. In his enthusiasm to satisfy the client, the team member not only answered his question, assuring him of the phone's superior camera functionality, but also took a photograph of the man. The client was so furious that he stormed into Keshav's office and threatened to cancel the project with immediate effect, fearing data theft through illicit use of camera phones.

The usual policy is that camera phones are not allowed into sensitive projects (such as those with links to the military or finance); such rules may also be applied on occasion to more mainstream IT projects in response to a client's specific concerns. Since that day Keshav's team has banned the use of camera phones during any IT projects relating to healthcare. This prohibits bringing smartphones (and any social media) into the work area; they may be accessed only at intervals from lockers provided some distance away. However, with the advent of social media, Keshav observes that these intervals have become more frequent; it isn't unusual to see employees taking a break every half hour to check their WhatsApp or Facebook messages. While social media use was also blocked by the company, restricting access to smartphones added to this restrictive policy for the purposes of data protection.

It must be said, however, that not all companies restrict smartphone access; it depends on the type of project, the policies and concerns of an individual client and so on. Restrictions on social media access, to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc., is standard practice in most large-scale IT companies; they tend to view these social networking sites as a major distraction from work, and thus categorise them as non-work. LinkedIn, the professional networking site, remains an exception in a few of these companies. It is more or less seen as a free knowledge exchange site, with its various IT-related knowledge groups, and some companies thus permit access to this site alone. Once again, however, this is based on the project and the team to which one belongs.

Such regulations have their limits, however. As Rajagopal, a 20-year veteran of Human Resources for an IT company, explains:

> With engineers these restrictions are always bypassed. We would be fools to think that these restrictions are strictly followed. However, we trust the integrity of these engineers. One thing is for certain: they know that they will lose their jobs if they steal our data or make it vulnerable, and we would make certain to take criminal proceedings against them and this in turn can destroy their career and life if we have an issue with data theft . . . so, they understand this . . . and, by the way, we can easily find out who bypasses these restrictions.

Vishak and Sujith, both aged 24 and unmarried, are engineers. They come from the state of Telangana, but now work for a business process outsourcing company in the Panchagrami area. They live close to the

field site. Vishak and Sujith work on a banking project for a European company. Strict restrictions are in place regarding the accessing of social networking sites on office computers, due to concerns about data theft. However, when employees log in to their clients' European systems (which they have to as a part of their job), they have unlimited access to social media. Similarly, over the weekends (in their free time) Vishak and Sujith accessed YouTube videos to watch old clips of cricket matches and download films, all through access to their clients' systems. While such practices would be frowned upon and might result in termination of employment if this became known, Vishak and Sujith noted that several of their colleagues did the same. They quipped that even their manager did this once in a while, and would not bother about such online adventures as long as their work was done and the data protection aspect was not compromised. Nor had any complaints been received from the client's side.

This case of Vishak and Sujith, as well as Rajagopal's statements, serve to prove that such boundary transgressions always exist; for highly qualified engineers, such rigid systems become a kind of joke. Another case of a work systems paradox is apparent: the client may prevent IT employees from accessing social media from the Indian systems, but instead permit access to social media through their own systems where such restrictions are not in place. From the standpoint of the IT company, they do place strict restrictions, but also recognise that they are dealing with highly qualified engineers who can bypass such restrictions with ease. They seem resigned to trusting the integrity of their employees rather than their systems. This kind of paradox exists not only with respect to restriction of access, but also to other work practices such as internal office communication.

Yet another group of companies moves between complete banning and restricted access. Medium-sized companies recognise the need for employees to socialise and allow limited access to social media through restricting times of access – between noon and 1 pm or after 6 pm, for example, which a few informants described as 'the Facebook time'. Several of these companies tend to allow complete access to LinkedIn, which they view as a knowledge medium, even while they restrict access to other social media. However, resourceful employees can then use LinkedIn to send personal messages. For example Suchitra, a 24-year-old IT employee, corresponded with her friend in another IT company over LinkedIn while working on a smartphone-restricted project; she simply sent her personal messages over LinkedIn's messaging system. However, most of these channels of communication change when such restrictions

are removed. When Suchitra shifted to a project which allowed employees to bring in smartphones, for instance, she shifted her private communication to WhatsApp, thereby reducing the use of company property for personal use.

With relatively small companies and start-ups, these restrictions do not really apply. Employees tend to access social media over phones as well as over their work systems, and now that WhatsApp has taken over instant messaging, unrestricted access to non-work aspects from a workplace is evident. Significantly when it comes to accessing social media from company equipment Facebook, YouTube and LinkedIn rank as the social media sites most visited from workplaces – mainly by the employees of these small companies and start-ups.

Admittedly most of these start-ups are web-based; their economic model is centred on advertising and mobile applications, thus requiring all of their employees to be online. But with this kind of work access to personal communication over social media reduces substantially, since most social media access now centres on work. Raghu, a 22-year-old physics graduate and the self-taught programmer of a start-up which designs mobile and social media apps, stated that:

> People in my company normally go on an invisible mode on Facebook while designing apps as constant personal communication can be disturbing, and also we most often sign into social media from a work account and not on personal accounts to counter this. Also my boss sits right next to me, since we have a flexible workspace policy.[58] The work area is small, so people know what you are up to. Though no one would let you know of your personal distractions immediately, they will ensure to pass on visible cues that will in itself get you straightened out. So we communicate over WhatsApp . . . it's easy and discreet and disturbs no one. Also it's easy in such a small setup to know what you do and when you do something online. While my good friends are at my workplace, I tend to do face-to-face communication. I only have my college friends on WhatsApp . . . so communication during work time with people outside work is sometimes minimal . . .

Raghu also likened his work to that of a filmmaker watching someone else's film; the focus is not on personal entertainment, but on the technical aspect of the film.

The cases of both Suchitra and Raghu are once again examples of how the system itself provides ample opportunities to overcome

the restrictions that a company places on employees. When it openly offers opportunities, however, the platform for such personal communications has already shifted. Employees no longer access social media over their company's property, but prefer to shift to their own devices.

Office communicator

To examine further the specific role of new digital communication technologies inside an IT work environment, we need to recognise that the context was not just an issue of the delineation of formal work spaces; it also related to the way in which these created particular conditions for communication. Formal work always also included non-work communication, such as a conversation with a colleague about a film that one saw last night or casual gossip in the office canteen or by the water cooler. Areas such as these, even inside a formal workplace, foster non-work communication. In recent years these areas have also expanded to include an online space, in which channels of non-work communication can occur. For example, the office instant messaging system, such as an instant communicator or internal office forums, allows for such non-work related communication to take place. So this use of online facilities – including internal office message systems for non-work related communication – has plenty of precedents in the way people at work previously chatted face to face by the water cooler[59] and elsewhere about other matters.

Like Sharath and Keshav's company, several IT companies restrict access to popular social media sites. However, in order to ensure that their employees still have a social network, some of these larger companies build their own social media sites for facilitating communication and allowing employees to socialise within the company. Several large companies also provide access to internal company forums, where employees can post group meet-ups and even sell items such as used books, watches, vehicles etc. Not everyone tends to use these facilities effectively, however, since this kind of social networking still tends to be work-related and operates in a work space where employee activities are observed. Inappropriate conduct on an internal company forum can have a significant impact on one's career, and so even where these platforms existed people never mistook them as a substitute for Facebook, WhatsApp or LinkedIn.

While start-ups do not provide internal social media (due to budgetary constraints), they tend to ask employees to socialise and build a

collegial atmosphere to complement the company's smaller structure. In reality employees do not do this over Facebook (though they might add friends from work), but rather do this face to face or over WhatsApp (if they are outside the work space). An exact parallel to this example is discussed in Chapter 6 with respect to school systems in Panchagrami.

This is yet another example of how the concept of system paradox works. The larger IT companies build their own social media for their employees who do not necessarily use such facilities effectively. Meanwhile start-ups which try to create a collegial atmosphere would love to create such bonding, but are restricted by financial constraints, leaving employees to communicate face to face.

While team meetings can be termed as formal, work-related meetings, several other meetings/interactions are more fluid in status; they may begin as formal, work-related communication yet move through a continuum of work between different spheres of life. A kind of smooth flow is maintained between different spheres of life through such communication, even if it takes place within a formal work system/work space. We now examine how social media has enhanced such mediation by offering channels of communication that in the factory system did not exist.

This section starts with three examples that explore the communication that takes place within the workplace over WhatsApp and an inter-office communicator. In the next section we review that communication within the wider context, where work communication is inseparable from communication that takes place outside of work. The final section shows how these combine to create a general social media space where local non-work contacts actually end up transforming the personnel structure of work by recruiting social media contacts into the workplace.

The following cases are fairly typical among a majority of middle-class IT workers who live and work at Panchagrami. In all these cases, the place from which such reaching out happens, namely the office space, is the space of contention.

None of what happens in the following cases can be termed 'office work' however hard one tries to categorise it as such. Yet what can be seen from these cases is the *'flow'* of communication and ideas from one sphere to another and the immediate movement back to the former. This applies whether relating to the pattern of communication between work and home spheres while at work, or between the spheres of work and hobbies, or between work and a sporting sphere with a particular group, which then flows back into the work sphere once again. The temporality of such flows might change and can be relative, but such flows happen on a daily basis and can never be avoided.

Anita and Purushottam – a couple on the inter-office communicator

Anita, aged 24, and Purushottam, 27, are recently married and both work for an IT company at Panchagrami. Purushottam is a project manager and Anita a business analyst; they work on different projects and are based on different floors in the same company. The couple arrive at the office together and leave together in a sedan car.[60] They message each other every couple of hours through the inter-office communicator, which connects all employees of the company on the intranet. They message each other to co-ordinate and plan lunch and coffee breaks and end up meeting each other at least four times in the span of their nine-hour working day. Frustrations that each may experience with their colleagues is sometimes expressed in code over the office communicator, so that no-one who may glance at their screens would understand to whom they are referring. Though the couple's romantic messages are reserved for WhatsApp rather than the office communicator, general messages – such as reminding the other to pay a telephone bill, organising to meet during the day etc. – are all exchanged through this office channel. To an onlooker it gives an image of one staring at a computer screen, conveying the image of being hard at work. Handling mobile phones, as Anita observes, gives the impression that one is not really working but wasting one's time fiddling away with things, and providing the manager with food for thought. In contrast communicating through the office communicator helps to preserve the image of a diligent worker, while at the same time enabling an employee to communicate with a close family member who works in the same office. Their case is similar to that of Ranga and Chandra, discussed in Chapter 4. Other cases of couples working in the same campus of a company and exchanging personal messages on official communication systems also emerged.

Ramanan and Balashankar – cycling buddies

Ramanan, aged 24 and unmarried, works for the same IT company as his cousin Balashankar, 36. Though both men work out of different branches of the same company, they found a common interest in cycling, both as a hobby and an exercise. They send each other messages related to cycling over WhatsApp and over the inter-office communicator, all being done while both are at work. The cousins are also members of a

cycling group which has a group page on Facebook. Posts on this page are constantly checked by Ramanan throughout the day and are sent to Balashankar. They chat with each other several times a day over both the inter-office communicator and WhatsApp, with communication at work revolving primarily around cycling. Once again, for both Ramanan and Balashankar, this does not necessarily require walking into the hallway to have a conversation. They can hold conversations while still sitting at their desks, so making it appear as though they are working.[61]

These examples showcase the way in which IT employees use the affordances of particular technologies to flow across different spheres of life. These provide possibilities for performative communication, which may enhance prestige in the workplace, while at the same time extending that work technology into the sphere of domestic life or hobbies, through a technology devised for the realm of work. They also provide evidence on why it has become particularly hard for companies to retain barriers to external communication, and demonstrate the challenges faced by the work system of companies who seek to enforce rigid boundaries between work and non-work communication. This is particularly the case when they employ married couples or closely related kin.

Cricket matches and Abhishek's office

During Indian Premier League cricket matches, Abhishek, a 27-year-old programmer, sends a message over the inter-office communicator to his friend, a business analyst in another project. He requests updated scores for the Chennai Super Kings,[62] a county cricket club that has some of India's most famous players. In turn Abhishek receives a message from Vidyashankar, a colleague of his, asking for scores. Soon most of the team members start browsing for scores on their smartphones and websites, then pass this information over the inter-office communicator to their colleagues. People also start getting messages from friends over Facebook and WhatsApp commenting on the cricket scores, and everything is passed through office communicator without disturbing any other teams working on the same floor. Everyone is involved, from the Vice President to the data entry operator. Next day everything returns to normal, and checking Facebook during office time is frowned upon. Though this case cannot be classified as the 'home' sphere moving into that of work, it is still a clear case of the non-work sphere moving into the work sphere. In doing so it creates an informality and bond among a group primarily formed for formal official work.

So before we even consider the issues of flow between work space and non-work spaces, we must recognise that within the office and the work environment there is already a complex mixture of flows between what may be considered strictly work and non-work aspects of communication.

Now, given that we have a bird's-eye view of how social media fits into the everyday work culture of IT firms in India, the everyday mediation in such a culture through personal communication technologies might be better appreciated through the following case study. It describes a typical weekday for a typical middle-class nuclear family at Panchagrami.

The re-integration of work and home cultures

In one of our earlier examples we discussed Anita and Purushottam, a married couple who shared a work environment. Now turn the clock forward a few years, to when they have had children. Perhaps by then they will have turned into Ravi and Shwetha.

Ravi, aged 36, and Shwetha, 32, are a couple who live in their own three-bedroom apartment within a multi-storey apartment complex at Panchagrami. Both work for IT companies in the field site. Theirs is a typical nuclear family with two children. The eldest, Vishal, is 10 years old and attends a well-reputed, affluent international school inside their apartment complex. Their daughter Anu is two and a half years old; she attends a nursery school right next to the apartment complex.

A typical day begins at around 5 am, when Shwetha and Ravi wake up to alarms set on their smartphones. While Ravi goes out for a quick run, Shwetha starts her cooking. Part of their routine also includes a quick check of their office email accounts on Outlook, a quick check of WhatsApp and a very quick glance into their respective Facebook profiles to see if they have missed any official or personal communication. All this completed, they begin the day's domestic chores. Vishal is woken up at 6 am for cricket coaching at school, scheduled for 7 am, after which he goes on to attend classes there. This is when Ravi steals some time off to read a few e-newspapers or tech magazines that he subscribes to on his iPad, concurrently checking his running (marathon) group page on Facebook. Anu is woken up at 6:30 am in order for Ravi to drop her off at her Montessori nursery by 8 am and then head directly to his office.

Meanwhile Shwetha leaves for her company at 7 am after finishing her cooking for the day. Owning two cars makes it easy for the Ravi

household, as they do not need to rely on each other for transport in the mornings. Once she reaches the office Shwetha sends Ravi a routine WhatsApp text to let him know that she has arrived safely. The note also includes a little 'love you and kisses' message. Ravi does the same thing twice, once when he drops Anu at her playschool and the other when he reaches his office. The first WhatsApp message is to let Shwetha know if Anu cried when she was dropped at school, as both of them have been worrying about their daughter's sudden outbursts for some time. The second message is to let Shwetha know that he has arrived at his office safely; this message would include a 'love you' note as well.

Around 10 am Shwetha calls her maid on her mobile phone to check if the maid has arrived at the house for cleaning, and to give her some instructions. If the maid does not respond, then Ravi receives a frustrated WhatsApp message from his wife, cursing the maid and grumbling that she cannot be trusted at all.

At around noon Anu's playschool sends a WhatsApp message to both Ravi and Shwetha, a service offered by the school for an extra cost. This is a daily report, sent only to parents who have requested it. The message specifically deals with how the child got on at school, what he or she did that morning and whether the child ate lunch properly. If Anu does not seem to have eaten her lunch, Shwetha calls the nursery to check what happened and sends a WhatsApp message to Ravi. When the maid arrived she would have given Shwetha a missed call[63] (phone calls are charged and she cannot afford to make calls), giving Shwetha a signal to call back. Otherwise she would make a call from the house landline to let Shwetha know of a courier service or gas service delivery that arrived unexpectedly. If something unexpected turns up, Shwetha and Ravi exchange WhatsApp messages to discuss or clarify things.

During or immediately after lunch (normally around 1 pm) both Shwetha and Ravi also send WhatsApp texts to each other, letting the other know whether they enjoyed the day's packed lunch. Shwetha normally heads homeward at around 2:30 pm, as part of her 'working from home' policy that is encouraged by the company. She picks up Anu from her school after a quick chat with her teacher. Another brief message is sent to Ravi letting him know that Anu has been picked up from school.

While Anu naps, Shwetha prepares a snack for Vishal, who arrives home from school at 3:30 pm. Once Vishal is home, Shwetha logs into her work computer again at around 4 pm, with music videos open on their HP home computer's Chrome browser. Vishal either goes to play with other children in the apartment complex at around 4:30 pm or chooses to play games on Xbox. By this time Anu is awake again, and Shwetha

joins her to watch cartoons on her iPad, then gets back to work. Around 6 pm Shwetha first asks Vishal to make a start on his homework, though it takes a while for Shwetha to convince her son to do his homework – a process usually involving asking, demanding and finally begging. He usually starts on his homework around 6:30 pm, during which time Shwetha does some more of her own work, helps Vishal with his homework and keeps an eye on Anu. At around 7:30 pm Ravi normally sends another WhatsApp text to let Shwetha know that he will be leaving the office in a few minutes or so and checking with her on dinner. Shwetha normally logs off from work at around 7 pm to prepare the meal, and also to feed Anu before dinnertime at 8:30 pm. However, preparing dinner is not as hectic as getting breakfast and lunch ready in the mornings. Shwetha makes sure to call her parents or her friends during this time; she operates with her Bluetooth earpiece and prepares the meal while continuing to help Vishal with his homework.

After dinner, while Ravi spends some time with Vishal on his homework, Shwetha gets Anu ready for bed. Between 9:30 pm and 10 pm is Shwetha's time for checking her social media for other messages; this is when she catches up on WhatsApp group messages from the four groups of which she is a member and chats with her female friends (both other working mothers and homemakers), as most of them only seem to be free then. Ravi does this from the office, so in the late evening he alternates between more office emails, WhatsApp and Facebook before retiring for the night.

This case represents a typical everyday routine for middle-class working families. Panchagrami has a lot of Shwethas, Ravis, Anus and Vishals. A deeper look at the case study would elucidate the emotions that such couples undergo and the lives they lead as nuclear households. They are typically referred to as 'double-income families' since both husband and wife are well qualified and usually work for private sector companies. Such families normally tend to make sure their office work is not hindered in any way; they are ambitious, aspiring for promotion at work while also trying to ensure that their family life or life outside work are not too disrupted. While the above case study is characteristic of how young working couples mediate their everyday family life, others have slight variations; most, however, fit into a broadly similar pattern.

What the details throw light on is polymedia[64] – the roles of the complementary personal communication technologies such as smartphones, WhatsApp and Facebook. This also shows how WhatsApp helps users mediate and catch up with domestic life while also expressing the

myriad emotions of love, guilt and frustration that occur during a long working day. This generation of younger working middle-class couples grew up in an era where their mothers were mostly homemakers, able to shower the children with attention, while only their fathers had paid employment. Having amassed significant education capital, and been presented with opportunities to turn this education capital into economic capital, this new middle class faces a dilemma of sorts. These professionals are aware that opportunities offering upward mobility through more senior positions at work and ensuring economic wellbeing should not be lost; but at the same time they recognise a need to give their children the level of attention that they received from their parents (especially their mothers).[65]

This is especially true in the cases of young middle-class working mothers. Interviewing young working mothers, and working mothers of young children, revealed a mix of emotions and a helplessness of sorts in not being able to perform what they thought were their moral duties well. These confused feelings are captured in the words of Purnima, a 27-year-old programmer for a major IT company, who has a two-year-old son.

> *"This is the age when my son needs me; I feel so guilty when I drop him at the crèche every morning. He thinks I will be with him. I don't know if he cries, but I cry every day. I know what I do is wrong . . . we just invested in a house and a car . . . I can't resign my job . . . my salary is needed to pay off these loans . . . at least I am ensuring a good future for my kid."*

After a minute she asked: 'Am I cheating myself by convincing myself that I am securing his future? Doesn't he need me now more than ever?'

Though interviews with working mothers of young children would normally divulge what Purnima revealed, there is more to this than what appears on the surface. Normally working mothers who had just had their first child were far more emotional when it came to leaving their first child and going to work than were mothers with a younger second child. Yet other cases show the exact opposite. For example Sridevi, a 30-year-old working mother, has two children aged seven and two. Her widowed mother stayed with her for over three years before she died, during which time she took care of Sridevi's first child. Now there is no family member to take care of her second child and Sridevi feels especially guilty, as she has to leave her toddler with a childminder instead of

a familiar family member. Similar to many parents in this area, Sridevi resorts to WhatsApp voice messages to feel more connected and present in her child's life.

Another example of WhatsApp facilitating domestic life can be seen in the case of Shankar and Janani. Shankar, aged 32, and Janani, 30, are a couple who work for two different IT companies at Panchagrami. Shankar normally drops their daughter at school and Janani at work. Shankar's mother picks up Sravya, her eight-year-old granddaughter, after school at around 4 pm and Shankar picks up Janani after work. They message each other and Shankar's mother over WhatsApp at least 10 times a day. This begins from the time Shankar reaches work, when he lets Janani (and sometimes his mother) know that he has arrived safely and has dropped off Sravya (and Janani) safely too. Another message is sent when Shankar goes for lunch at noon, and more during the two or three coffee breaks of the day. Some of these messages are not synchronous and both partners take their time in answering these messages, depending on the work in which they are engaged at that precise moment. However, most messages are normally answered within half an hour. Once Sravya is home, she messages Janani over WhatsApp from her grandmother's phone to tell her that she has reached home safely. The grandmother messages both Janani and Shankar at around 6 pm to tell them about any groceries they might need to purchase on their way back home, along with a menu for dinner.

If we exchange the grandmother's role for that of a female cook, you might also see Kavitha's case reflected here. Typical families in Panchagrami with an elderly member at home tend to communicate in this fashion.

However, even with grandparents around, things are not quite all they appear – something apparent in the case of Lakshmi, whom we met in Chapter 2. Being a busy IT manager, Lakshmi used WhatsApp voice messages to contact her children from her workplace. When asked if she was able to achieve a 'good work–life balance', she smiled and replied:

> I wish I could, that's why I talk. I am struggling to find this. I try my best to negotiate team meetings and deadlines. My Blackberry phone helps me even while I am not at work. Though my team is an all-men team, they are good so they understand.

Personal life does intrude upon her at work, but she explains that social media such as WhatsApp helps her to manage it.

However, children continue to have the highest priority, and grandparents to take care of grandchildren while parents are at work. Bearing this in mind, an interesting dimension to the joint family system as seen in Chapter 4 was witnessed at Panchagrami. As seen above, marriage into a traditional family with several expectations can cause severe stress for working women who move away from the joint family system with their spouse and children. However, this poses a problem of childcare when they work. In order to navigate this issue, a workable solution – that of staying close to parents and parents-in-law – is becoming a trend, as seen above and discussed in Chapter 4. This ensures that they still live apart as nuclear families, but also remain close by as neighbours; close enough, in effect, to be a joint family. For many working families this becomes a viable solution, not only ensuring privacy, but also guaranteeing safe and inexpensive childcare – and food too, in some cases.

The husbands of these young mothers seem to appreciate such issues with childcare moralities as well as their practical needs. They help in various ways, for instance by dropping young children off at school[66] and sometimes by cooking.[67] Most middle-class families also have a maid who undertakes other domestic chores such as cleaning.

At the same time, the middle classes in Panchagrami are a collective group, so establishing and staying in contact with friends and extended family was important as well. This was clearly shown when people were asked to name the circles of connections that they see as important. Although 96 per cent of couples named their spouses and children in their first circle of importance, 89 per cent of middle-class couples named their friends and family in their second circle of importance. Some actually named their dogs in the first circle and their mother-in law in the second. There was no statistically significant difference between men and women who did this. Their need for connection is evident in families such as that of Ravi and Sujatha, who somehow manage to stay in touch with friends and family through WhatsApp and Facebook groups.

Many cases like these exist at Panchagrami. Along with a pressing desire for upward mobility and for asserting and exercising morals of childcare that trouble them, we can see the constant need of individuals to keep in touch with their domestic lives, though they normally end up working long hours in office jobs. One way they manage to bridge these elements is through ensuring constant communication between both aspects: the spheres of work and domestic life.

While all of this might seem self-evident, it is still not straightforward in modern workplaces – especially in IT companies, which

have their own set of regulations about what is and is not permissible within their office space. As seen earlier, since access to social media is not allowed on work computers, this can only be done through affordable smartphones. However, a few companies that view social media as an efficient tool for managing a work–life balance do allow restricted access – during lunchtime, for instance, or after core working hours. Weekends are always open to access such sites, but a tab is kept on broadband usage: anything that exceeds a certain level of usage (the level varies by company and by team) is monitored and acted upon, so that company property is not misused. All of this matters less and less as such restrictions are bypassed through personal smartphones, which guarantee 24/7 connections without anyone breathing down the users' necks.

In the review of the general literature on work in India, it was noted that a further dilution of a strict 'work to non-work' division ideal was the way that kinship itself infiltrated into the workplace. This may serve to blur the boundaries still further when considering an IT company. This specific phenomenon might be better explained with a case drawn from the lower socio-economic classes at Panchagrami. Employees from these backgrounds typically work for these IT companies in lower management roles or other jobs associated with that level.

Mediating structures in the IT industry: kin-based networks in lower socio-economic classes

As seen in previous chapters, Panchagrami is comprised of villages that have strong caste-based networks. Most members of the same caste in these villages are related to one another, or at least address each other in fictive kin terms. This is more often an intra-caste characteristic than one between castes, though the universalisation of fictive kin terms such as '*Anna*' (meaning older brother) is an inter-caste aspect that exists almost all over Tamil Nadu.

In these villages most youngsters between the ages of 18 and 30 from lower socio-economic classes are either dropouts (from secondary school or college) or hold degrees from local colleges. The majority work for an IT/ITES company closer to their village. They occupy lower management posts, and some end up with a position involving work of a decent status, for example as a copy assistant, records keeper, hardware technician etc. These young people consciously avoid jobs such as cleaning in offices, which are traditionally associated with lower caste

positions.[68] Although not all of them hold a degree, they feel that their literacy, and the importance this brings them in the knowledge economy, has given them the necessary impetus to revolt against traditional caste norms. This conscious decision represents a significant rejection of caste shackles among young people, and may herald a movement towards upward social mobility.[69]

So how do these young people end up in positions in IT/ITES companies – some even without degrees? None of these IT companies have any kind of formal affirmative action plans to supply these village youngsters with skilled jobs; however, for support staff roles (and those of cleaning staff) many such companies do recruit from the local areas; it is easier to hire local villagers for lower grade positions rather than for managerial posts. So although the IT companies may not be active in securing the youngsters management level jobs, the youngsters help themselves by recruiting one another into lower management positions.

The story of Dharshan and Naga is typical of how the current generation of youngsters are helping each other to secure entry-level jobs in the IT sector. A few years ago Dharshan, now aged 30, had dropped out of high school after a failed love affair. As a true mark of friendship Naga, now 29 and a close friend of Dharshan, also left. Not having anything to do, the two boys scouted around various IT companies, spending much of their time in casual chats to avoid boredom and pass the time.[70] A school senior, who worked for one of the IT companies, spotted the pair and asked what they were doing. After hearing their story, this senior had offered them advice and also agreed to help the boys secure jobs in the company he worked for as record-keeping staff, since both were able to read and write English. Dharshan and Naga agreed and, given the urgent need for staff in these positions, the hiring company did not ask many questions in the interview process, simply ensuring that the boys could read and write.

Shortly afterwards they discovered that hard work paid dividends. While Darshan became the head of record keeping for one of the IT company's particular clients, Naga moved into the area of records collecting. Both had permanent roles in the company. When a school friend of theirs came knocking at their doors looking for help in finding a job, Darshan and Naga helped by exerting their influence to find him a job as a records copier in the same company. Not long after this experiment of placing a friend bore results, the young men discussed why they should help members of their own community and relatives find similar positions, thus assisting them to achieve social and economic mobility. It seemed a good plan. However, they did not go out to advertise this, but simply

posted a job opening in their IT company on their Facebook profile unofficially, to see whether other young men from the area responded. They did! The pair were successful in placing a relative of Naga's without a degree in their company, where he was in charge of the logistics department.

Word quickly spread that Darshan and Naga could help youngsters secure good jobs. The young men in the area either waited until the pair posted job adverts on Facebook or approached them directly asking for help. The idea, as Darshan noted, was to pounce on these job openings as soon as they were internally advertised, rather than wait until everyone else knew about them, thereby beating the competition. Their strategy now is to not even advertise these openings on Facebook – instead they text a suitable person through WhatsApp, so that he or she can apply immediately. Sometimes they send WhatsApp texts to around four or five potential candidates and check to see who is suitable for positions that have opened up. As noted earlier, this behaviour is not something new, but a key characteristic of work in India. However, in the past kin connections would have been recruited through word of mouth, whereas now social media is able to extend this process from the family to a wider context of one's local community.

The people who secure jobs look out for other openings in the company, so helping others from their community to find positions as well. Darshan has now started helping female graduates from his area secure good positions in his IT company. He communicates with parents rather than the girls themselves, as they generally do not possess mobile phones, and uses his influence to find positions that do not damage the girls' reputations in the community. For example, the records division and the transport division consists of mostly men. Darshan did not believe that it was appropriate for women from his community to work there. If they did, he felt they would be very uncomfortable, or at least their parents would be, and rumours might spread in their village which might damage the girl's character and marriage prospects. Instead he placed female applicants in data entry positions, where more women worked than men. The pair also clearly distinguish between positions suitable for someone without a degree and those with a degree, for instance records copying and data analyst respectively.

This network now seems to have expanded to other companies in the neighborhood as well. Messages about job vacancies in lower management positions are passed on through a WhatsApp group, and recruitment takes place more quickly than through a regular process. This internal referencing method for lower management positions seems to work in a fast and effective way. Another aspect of this is the

prior training given to these candidates, either by Darshan and/or Naga or by one of their earlier recruits, depending on the position for which the candidate is applying to. Jointly the pair have placed around 25 youngsters in various positions; they claim that their success rate has been around 95 per cent.

So what do Darshan and Naga get in return? They have carefully constructed an image for themselves in their community and have gained considerable social capital. Further, the elders of their community perceive them as people who have shaped the future of young people in the community. For Darshan and Naga, their workplace has become a place where members of their own community are found in significant numbers. Following an invitation from Naga and Darshan, a visit to the work floor of the records section revealed that most men here addressed each other not as 'Sir' but as '*Mama*', a colloquial term for Uncle, or as '*Anna*', meaning older brother. They normally ate together and had established a kin network within a modern IT/ITES company. Everyone had a smartphone with WhatsApp installed, helping them to communicate and send information to one another about opportunities as they arose. Whatever happened in the community was passed along through WhatsApp even during office hours, and no-one felt that he was working overtime as they were working with their families and relatives. Whether they were away from home or away from work made little difference: it was all the same.

Darshan and Naga take care of those holding non-professional degrees or those without degrees, supporting them in gaining employment in lower management positions. Vasu, on the other hand, helps engineering graduates from his community find employment in middle management positions – either in the IT company for which he works (as a data security administrator) or in other IT companies. Aged 28, he comes from the same community as Darshan and Naga and holds a professional degree in engineering. Vasu, Darshan and Naga all belong to the same caste; they have battled to gain social mobility and understand the struggles for social mobility experienced by their contemporaries. Recently graduated engineers, or engineers looking for a job change, knock on Vasu's door. He sits with these members of his kin network to coach them through the process of preparing a good CV, creating a LinkedIn profile, answering interview questions and generally preparing them as potential candidates, all before he recommends them for a job. In reality, however, the phrase 'sitting down with Vasu' has a different meaning. He tends to meet potential candidates only once, subsequently talking to them over Skype and communicating information

about potential job opportunities through WhatsApp: everything is done online. Vasu does this from his office or from home, but he makes sure that relatives who come seeking help gain an understanding of other communication tools, expanding their horizons well beyond personal communication on social media. Darshan and Naga do not pressurise people to create a LinkedIn profile, as they do not have one themselves. Vasu, in contrast, ensures that his network of job-seeking relatives not only create LinkedIn profiles, but also understand how to access knowledge-based engineering groups on the site. This, he stresses, will come in handy not only during job interviews but also once they are in new roles at work. Vasu's success rate has been around 70 per cent, which he feels is not bad for someone trying to help his relatives into management positions in IT companies. Those seeking Vasu's advice have expanded beyond his own caste and kin network, and now include individuals from other castes and communities as well.

However, what has to be noted here is not just the movement of kin networks from one space into another, but also the creation of candidates for positions through the creation of knowledge. In other words these are informal knowledge networks, operating under the guise of kin networks. All of these, whether focused on recruitment or bonding, operate out of the workplace. These forms of recruitment allow us to make comparisons with the recruitment of factory-based, low-skill labour, as studied at Chota Nagpur, Tiruppur or other such work spaces. Though the nature of such recruitment is essentially the same, the speed at which it can happen with the aid of social media differs significantly. Social media may have the effect of reducing competition, as in the case of Darshan and Naga. The speed of recruiting someone by passing and limiting information also helps the pair gain approval and a greater social status, both at the workplace and within their own community.

Restrictions on social media do happen here as well. For example, when Naga had a friend take a picture of himself in the documents room and posted it on Facebook, his manager's manager, a Facebook friend of his, threatened him with dire consequences if he did not take down the picture immediately. Inadvertently it had been taken in a 'safe room' – an area in which, according to the client's policies, photography and use of smartphones was restricted. Naga had to apologise and remove the picture. He also closed down the Facebook account and opened a fresh one, this time friending only local friends whom he knew well, not his superiors from work. In such circumstances visibility had led to restriction; bypassing these restrictions by unfriending someone or opening another account was an easy solution – and one that again reflected

aspects of a work systems paradox. While social media is useful and praised when used for recruitment, it is frowned upon when it displays certain elements of one's workplace.

Conclusion

What has been discussed above is a clear case of how personal communication tools have been used strategically to enhance the mediation and negotiation of superimposed Western industrial structures of work and non-work divisions – in an environment that has never favoured strict demarcation between different spheres of life. This mediation is nothing new: it has been an age-old practice in India that we can see being practised even in certain industries even in contemporary times.[71] What is new, however, is the role of personal communication enabled by digital technology, which did not previously exist. Such mediation occurs since the workforce is expected to adhere to a certain sense of formality associated with stepping into a space clearly delineated for work; once there, employees are encouraged to disassociate themselves from all other spaces for a certain period of time. Yet the continuity of relationships from one sphere to another, irrespective of the individual space, always undermined such inherent formality. The earlier literature provides considerable evidence of the way in which kinship infiltrates the workplace, leading to further recruitment through the family.[72] Here we see that social media tends to broaden the basis of connectivity beyond the family, reflected in a wider network of recruitment upon which firms can draw.

We have also explored how anthropology deals with the notion of work, and how this plays out in Panchagrami, and have considered cases in which communication at work expands to include non-work communication topics contained within the work culture. We have also discussed a case of romantic relationships and marriage, and how that leads to our next section about the integral nature of communication between work and home. However, what also became apparent was the multi-layered segregation of work–non-work boundaries that occurs in modern workplaces, for example the IT sector. While a few companies, mostly start-ups, were not concerned about such dichotomies, others were – usually more to satisfy their clients' business requirements. In IT companies there seemed to be an unstated agreement among the management tiers that it was fine for one to engage in some limited non-work related activities while at the office, but this should not be

made explicit. Everyone was aware of the position, but no one would acknowledge it openly.

What also became apparent was the employees' strategic presentation of themselves in relation to the workplace norms. At one level, though everyone knew that they had to engage in non-work-related activities while at the office, no one expressed dissent regarding the strict workplace policies around this; they appeared to perform as if conforming to these workplace regulations. However, at another level they were constantly expressing dissent, by ensuring that such regulations were bypassed, while taking care that this was not made explicit. As noted above, however, all of this formed part of an unstated agreement to which the employees actually conformed.

The intimacy expressed in relationships, as described in Chapter 4, calls for varied kinds of interaction between people involved in them. Some involve textual communication and others voice; yet others involve a combination of the two. But, as seen in the earlier chapter, while mothering still involves communication by voice, social media helps to afford asynchronous voice communications, as when Lakshmi used WhatsApp to be a mother to her children while still at work. We also see that in cases of working couples the type of communication based on the context enables them to use a variety of media to communicate with each other – a clear instance of polymedia. In this continual flow of interaction between domestic and work spheres, it was also clearly apparent that in the case of these couples polymedia involved covert communication over regulated internal office systems. By expanding such communication to other work relationships, we have also seen how this has moved the earlier conversations around the water cooler to something that now takes place at one's own desk.

In the cases of working couples, especially those with young children, it might seem that with the increase in social media communication the responsibilities of women in such households have decreased. However, that does not appear to be the case. Although it could be argued that such communication platforms have actually helped women manage both home and work spheres more effectively, this has in no way decreased their domestic responsibilities; in a way it has simply added more. The need to check constantly on children while striving to manage expectations at work is evident in their cases.

Being a good homemaker is an expectation that these women seem to have imbibed from middle-class moralities, which they have grown up with as normative. These young mothers experience constant feelings of guilt, and they sometimes tend to overcompensate in relation to

these expectations in order to mitigate such feelings – even when their parents or parents-in-law live closer to them and help to take care of the children. In some nuclear families the husband does attempt to share domestic responsibilities, but in many cases the balance of domestic work share has not yet reduced. So young mothers use social media strategically to place themselves in a competitive corporate workplace while at the same time fulfilling their expected roles within the family.[73]

Further, while recruitment through kin networks is a well-established facet of the Indian labour market, in the case of Vasu, Darshan and Naga it has changed. What began as a kin-based network has now evolved to encompass a wider base of people connected locally through social media. Such aspects of recruitment are not radically new, but they have now shifted from those driven by word of mouth, as seen in the traditional examples of manufacturing factory towns,[74] to those driven by social media in a IT-dominated knowledge economy. Such a shift has thus helped to re-institute some local characteristics of Indian labour after a relatively short period in which abstract and foreign notions of clear dichotomies between work and non-work spheres were introduced.

The case of using social media to combat competition by directly informing relatives and other known people of vacancies for lower management positions needs to be understood in the context of the wider world and its associated socio-cultural issues. It might seem a scenario that fosters nepotism. Yet we should also consider the larger socio-cultural issues that these caste groups face, and the absence of affirmative action employment plans from IT industries in the area. In this context such proactive recruitment strategies could rather be viewed as a path for social mobility, as well as a revolt against the traditional caste norms that the larger system places on them.[75]

We can also see how the example of Darshan and Naga's recruitment for the IT companies neatly speaks to the concept of scalable sociality.[76] Here communication about vacancies and roles moves between groups of different sizes, and from some pieces of information being publicly stated on Facebook to others being privately exchanged with a select few on WhatsApp. Vasu's case of using multiple platforms, on the other hand, is a clear instance of polymedia in action. In all these cases, mediating the boundaries of work and non-work was clear.

However, while it may be tempting to suggest that the 'work–non-work' dichotomy was always circumvented through the agency of the employees alone, this is not entirely true. The work system we are considering is filled with paradoxes. It appears to restrict and regulate a

particular practice, while at the same time providing enough opportunities to bypass what has been restricted with relative ease.

So going back to the introduction, we can see that the anthropological refusal to accept a clear dichotomy of work and non-work is based on the study of places such as Panchagrami. It is important to recognise that in such places there has never been a simple, rigid separation of work and non-work; where such boundaries were imposed, they were often circumvented. Nevertheless, the rise of social media has done much more than simply speak to this issue, as is evident from the detailed stories in this chapter. They show a richness of interactivity within work, outside of work and between work and non-work that may in some respects be unprecedented.

6
The wider world: social media and education in a knowledge economy

A day in the life of Ranjith

Ranjith is 15 years old and from an upper middle-class background. He attends an international school.

Wednesday

6 am – Alarm rings . . . snooze . . . catch another 5 minutes of sleep . . . hear mum shouting at the top of her voice . . . but go back to sleep again . . . it's all a dream . . . wake up in another 5 minutes to a WhatsApp message from Samvrat, asking if the basketball practice is still scheduled for 7 am and if the English essay is due at 11 am. Curse words used! Answer Yes to basketball practice and '****! I forgot' to English essay. Add a quick suitable smiley face and send off message on WhatsApp. [Here his mother shouts once again on seeing Ranjith's use of his phone as the first thing he does in the morning.]

6:15 am–6:45 am – Curse self and pray that English teacher will excuse the essay that is due today while brushing teeth. Have coffee while half asleep – hear mum shouting at the top of her voice that I shouldn't have gone to sleep at 2 am. Realise that she is right and promise self to have no gaming and chatting after 10 pm. Finish morning ablutions. Quick check of Facebook . . . 'like' Sowmya's picture with her new puppy. Check WhatsApp . . . feel happy looking at Samvrat's message that he hasn't finished the English homework either . . . all the while eating cornflakes. Rush off to basketball practice.

7 am–8 am – Basketball . . . snap pictures of others practising and post them on Facebook. Coach sneers at the smartphone. Promise coach

to leave it at home next time. Check post and see that it already has 10 likes.

8 am – Rush home to leave phone . . . quick wash . . . check WhatsApp . . . happy that only a few people in class remembered the essay was due today . . . appreciate Samvrat's quick WhatsApp homework status check with classmates . . . check Facebook . . . basketball post already has 12 likes. Maybe everyone is on their way to school . . . school doesn't allow mobile phones . . . so maybe the post will get more likes that evening.

8:30 am – School begins – physics class . . . listen to a 15 min lecture followed by a documentary screening from Discovery Channel video on YouTube . . . Smart classrooms are just awesome.

9:15 am – Maths class – Solve calculus . . . teacher checks to see if everyone watched the required assignment from Khan Academy.[1]

10 am – Interval – quick check with everyone about essay and also let them know of the Facebook picture.

11 am – English class – Teacher excuses essay, as majority of the class hasn't completed it either. Rush to the computer lab, where the teacher asks class to type in the essay. Vijay, a classmate, stealthily checks email . . . site gets firewalled . . . lab co-ordinator must have seen him checking and restricted access.

Noon – Lunch . . . catch up with friends . . .

12:45 pm – Head off to biology and chemistry classes.

2:30 pm – Computer science lab session. C programming. Search Google for C routines . . . access online C classes and check for aspects of this routine. Try accessing Facebook . . . website blocked. Access YouTube . . . check for lessons on C.

3:15 pm – Head home . . . check WhatsApp . . . check Facebook ... still only 14 likes. Start gaming along with quick snacking.

4:00 pm–7:30 pm – Online gaming . . . check WhatsApp and Facebook . . . 30 likes – awesome! Mum home . . . shouts to get back to studying.

8:00 pm – Mum calls for help with buying a flower vase from Flipkart[2] . . . watch YouTube . . . keep checking WhatsApp and Facebook. Dad arrives home from work. Eat dinner. Help Dad with some iPad issues.

9:00 pm – Research online for English essay . . . due date fixed for tomorrow . . . message Aditi and Samvrat to see if they have completed . . . everyone is online . . . in the process of writing/typing it. Call Samvrat to talk about essay and end up chatting about basketball.

11:00 pm – Complete essay . . . upload it to the school online assignment system . . . start online gaming . . . shift between WhatsApp and Facebook.

11:30 pm – Dad looks into the bedroom, says it's bedtime.

11:45 pm – Mum peeks in this time and shouts that it's bedtime.

0:30 am – Finally get to sleep early, after kissing goodnight to Aditi on WhatsApp voice message.

A day in the life of Pandian

Pandian is 15 years old and from a lower socio-economic background. He attends a private local school.

Wednesday

4:30 am – Wake up . . . sister's voice says it's time to wake up . . . rush to brush teeth and finish morning ablutions. Get to the paddy field . . . it's easy to receive a mobile signal there. Check Facebook. Vinoth and Suraj have uploaded pictures taken yesterday . . . 'like' and comment on them. Check to see if any new friends requests have come in. It's almost 30 minutes . . . need to rush to the cowshed.

5 am–7 am – Milk cows, work in the paddy field.

7 am – Check Facebook . . . Deepak has commented and liked too. Like Deepak's comment in turn . . . Browse through Friends profiles. Have tea and finish breakfast of rice gruel.

7:30 am – Quick wash and rush to catch bus to school. Check Facebook on the way to school. Listen to actor Vijay's 'Selfie Pulla'[3] song and other Tamil film songs. Need to download some more songs. Should remember to buy new data pack this evening.

8:10 am – Arrive at school . . . talk to Suraj and Vinoth about their Facebook pictures. Listen to a new song from Vinoth's mobile phone.

8:30 am–11:00 am – Tamil, English and maths classes . . . need to copy notes quickly from the blackboard as English teacher erases them from the blackboard very quickly . . . submit homework notebook at the end of maths class.

11:00 am – Interval – Transfer a few new songs from Vinoth's phone.

11:15 am – Physical training class – Teacher asks to see if any new film songs are available . . . Vinoth transfers new songs . . . asks for new Tamil films downloaded from the internet . . . transfer it from Suraj's phone. Play football . . . Lunch.

1:50 pm – Computer science class. Computer science teacher asks everyone to copy a computer programme written on the blackboard . . . go to computer science lab. Run the programme. Get result. Chat with friends . . . Deepak helps teacher to fix a broken computer.

3:30 pm – Go to the roadside bunk-sized mobile phone shop with Suraj and recharge data plan for Rs. 15/–. Get new songs loaded for an additional Rs. 5/–.

5:00 pm – Quick tea . . . rush to the paddy field . . . tie cows . . . listen to new songs . . . check Facebook . . . post picture of Tamil film actor Vijay[4] downloaded from Google. Never-failing friend Suraj always likes it first.

7:00 pm – Do homework . . . check Facebook.

8:00 pm – Have dinner . . . ask mum and sister to join in watching a new Tamil film transferred from Suraj . . . transfer film from phone to the government-provided laptop borrowed from cousin. Mum and sister express their admiration for the technical expertise and knowledge shown in not only getting the film, but also the ease with which it was transferred.

10:30 pm – Film ends . . . check to see if cows in the cowshed are all right. Check Facebook once again.

11:00 pm – Sleep.

In themselves these two highly contrasting accounts would seem to represent the daily lives of two 15-year-old schoolchildren and their relation to social media. Yet these are not two disparate scenes occurring in two different societies: they take place alongside one another at Panchagrami. In order to see what we can learn from them we have to step back a bit, then consider as background the macro-level social structures that enable both of these versions to happen within the same area. That is the precisely the task of this chapter.

Introduction

Every book in this series has a similar heading to the sixth chapter, signifying a common objective. The task of these chapters within this series is to analyse how larger social structures and infrastructures impact upon social media or may be transformed by social media. In some cases the authors have considered several such structures, among them politics, the state, religion and commerce.[5] But in the case of Panchagrami many of these wider issues such as politics and caste have been discussed throughout this book; to deal with them as a whole would simply be too complex. Instead this chapter seeks to provide an in-depth

analysis of one particular context, that of education. Education brings with it a wider arena of aspiration and the struggle for prosperity, or at least a decent living. It follows on naturally from the themes of the last chapter, as it is highly relevant to the specific work practices that have developed around the IT sector. By focusing on this single field, it is possible to give a depth of analysis that a broad-spectrum approach would not permit.

The following sections provide a glimpse of how the development of educational infrastructure has in a way become a symbol of how this area is perceived as a 'knowledge economy'[6] – thereby kindling aspirations across all socio-economic classes, which in turn go on to influence the provision of education in this area. We then survey the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in schools, where internet access, social media and mobile phones play a significant role. Next we explore how the different school systems at Panchagrami perceive social media, and move on to discuss the aspect of teachers becoming friends of students on social media. Finally the chapter ends with a case study of how certain affluent schools create their own social media, in order to discourage students from accessing popular social media sites.

The influences of other socio-economic factors on education are also discussed. An attempt is made to showcase how macro-structures operate in the background, influencing the seemingly disparate everyday use of social media, as in the two cases given above.

Knowledge economy: an identity that inspires aspirations

While researchers debate whether a knowledge economy is appropriate for India,[7] the Indian government has adopted the idea in earnest. The concept is also reflected in how the local government in Panchagrami, as well as the region's private IT enterprises, have struggled for over a decade to ensure that this area projects the image of a knowledge economy. They have set up IT companies and managed to attract a skilled and educated workforce. To a certain extent they seem to have achieved their intention, as outsiders also ascribe such an identity to this area. Though an inhabitant of Panchagrami might not understand the term 'knowledge economy', he or she would certainly understand that this area is transforming to an economy that values knowledge above anything else, and this is reflected in their educational aspirations.[8]

As seen in Chapter 1, establishing an IT park brought with it several infrastructural changes. Educational institutions catering to the emerging needs of IT companies for skilled labour was one of them. An upsurge in the number of schools and colleges in and around Panchagrami occurred along with other forms of expansion, including the building of more sophisticated housing, commercial spaces and other affiliated services to cater to a skilled incoming population. For a long-term Panchagrami resident, all of these changes, combined with laptops and mobile phones, came to symbolise an economy that placed an immense value on knowledge and skills.

For the lower socio-economic classes at Panchagrami, the word 'IT' has now become a synonym for prosperity. They perceive 'IT' as computers inside massive buildings with visibly intimidating architecture,[9] symbolising development and prosperity that can be attained only through knowledge and education. Thus, for the lower socio-economic classes, working for an IT company translates directly to social mobility. People's aspiration for such mobility is reasserted on an everyday basis – not only by the architecture in this area, but also by the visible use of newer resources in this area (such as upscale housing, expensive restaurants, newer smartphones etc.) by the educated middle-class population that has recently arrived.[10]

The parents from the lower socio-economic class strive to attain this aspiration for social mobility through their children. They provide their children with computers, which to them signify knowledge. Accessing the internet and social media such as Facebook through these computers is viewed as further proof that their children are on the right path for achieving social mobility. The next step is to send their children to the right school, which for them roughly translates as a school that provides education through computers.

Rani, aged 36, is a housemaid and a long-term resident of Panchagrami. She works at one of the multi-storeyed apartment complexes that symbolise the massive infrastructural transformation that the area has undergone. Rani understands IT as those massive air-conditioned office buildings, where well-educated and well-dressed people work on computers all day and get paid a lot to do it. Having dropped out of school at the age of eight, while still in the third grade, she now wants her twin son and daughter, now in the ninth grade, to study well and gain jobs in the IT sector in the near future. She had bought them a second-hand desktop computer and a second-hand, originally government-provided laptop a couple of years ago, hoping to inspire them and drive them hard to fulfil her ambition.

Similar to the aspirations of the lower socio-economic class, upper middle-class families (mostly comprising the 'double-income' IT employees) also aspire to send their children to the right schools. For this group the 'right' schools consist of English-medium schools following either international or national-level syllabi. With the proliferation of such schools in this area, one distinction that these schools tend to showcase is the 'smart classroom' facility, meaning that the classrooms are ICT (information and communication technology)-enabled and are connected to the internet. This also means that they have access to newer learning platforms such as the Khan Academy,[11] open courseware[12] and video documentaries on YouTube.

Ashwin, aged 41, works for a multinational IT company. For over four years he worked in the US as a consultant at one of its client's offices, based in Arizona. As his company wanted him to return to India for some time, Ashwin bought himself an apartment in Panchagrami. Since he was not sure about his long-term plans in India (he might return to the US at some point, depending on his career and the company's plans) and his 11-year-old son was studying in the sixth grade, he wanted to ensure that the boy went to an international school. This would provide him with internet access and include sufficient emphasis on ICT in its teaching curriculum – something Ashwin felt was important in case the family decide to go back to the US. Even if they do not, and his son wishes to get into a premier engineering college in India instead, this exposure would stand him in good stead.

One can find many people like Rani and Ashwin at Panchagrami. They are examples of how parents plan their children's education strategically, hoping to give them a secure future. Another kind of parent, usually from the lower middle class, is happy to send his/her child to a private school where English is the medium of instruction with a state-level syllabus. In so doing they hope to ensure that the child studies hard to become a graduate in engineering or a scientific or commercial subject, and so may enter the IT sector that way.

Parental aspirations can thus be seen to form a pattern. Irrespective of the school in which the children study, or the social class to which the family belongs, the IT sector seems to be the destination of choice for their children. In summary, for these parents getting their children into respectable positions in the IT sector symbolises getting them settled in life while at the same time attaining social mobility. To achieve this the children need to study in an English-medium school, which gives preference to technology (at least as a learning platform); the ICTs[13] in such schools symbolise this.

School system at Panchagrami

The schools[14] found at Panchagrami fall into three different systems: the state board schools,[15] which follow the Tamil Nadu state syllabi; CBSE schools,[16] which follow the national-level syllabi; and IGCSE schools,[17] which follow an international syllabus. In and around Panchagrami you can find two international schools, half a dozen CBSE schools and at least a dozen private and government-owned state board schools. For ease of understanding, this chapter will use terms such as 'affluent schools' and 'less affluent schools' instead of the actual school boards. Generally an affluent school would be one in which middle- and upper middle-class children study (they are mostly the international and CBSE schools, though a few privately owned state board schools can also be classified in this way), while the less affluent schools are the government and other private local state board schools. The latter cater to the lower socio-economic class and the lower middle class, and charge a fee[18] that is significantly lower than their affluent counterparts. However, the infrastructural facilities at these schools are less good.

While all affluent schools have English as the medium of instruction, less affluent state board schools have either Tamil or English as their medium.[19] However, in this area a rise in demand[20] for English-medium schools over Tamil medium schools was to a large extent fuelled by the employment practices of the IT sector, though a desire for English education had begun to creep in around 30 years ago. Ironically, the children who now study in the primary classes of the Tamil-medium government schools are those of poor migrant labourers who have migrated to Panchagrami from other Indian states to work in construction.

Though both the affluent and the less affluent schools at Panchagrami advertise their ICT infrastructure, a significant distinction between these schools is highlighted through smart classrooms and internet connectivity. This factor makes or breaks a school's popularity and the demand for places it experiences. While several affluent schools rationalise their steep fees through the smart classroom system, the less affluent schools make do with a computer lab.

ICT and social media in schools

Not surprisingly the affluent schools in this area have the best ICT and smart classroom facilities, with several of their computers connected to

the internet. A popular pedagogical method adopted in these schools is to show videos from YouTube. Another source that the teachers tapped into was the Khan Academy.[21] Google Search and Google Images also provide additional resources for these teachers to research for class presentations and projects. Other than this, these affluent schools also had a few systems with unrestricted internet access in the staff common room. Some schools also encouraged students to ask teachers for help in downloading material from the internet during activity-based projects.

However, when it came to students, most affluent schools had strict rules restricting access to the internet; almost all of them ban access to social media sites on school computers. Though children of the fifth grade and above are actively encouraged to access the internet under the guidance of teachers and a lab instructor, the teachers invariably complain of a few disobedient children in the higher grades (usually the tenth or eleventh grades) accessing certain restricted sites unbeknownst to them. It was apparent that this was new to these schools, which were also constantly experimenting in their approach to the internet and social media sites.[22]

The affluent schools, as they come to terms with the internet-enabled ICT infrastructure, also strive to satisfy the parental demand for practical lessons on safe internet browsing habits for their children. This was in part because these children often belonged to 'double-income' families, in which both parents were employed, and so children were usually alone at home until mid-evening. Both teachers and parents saw the combination of a lonely environment at home, an iPad or a laptop and an unrestricted internet connection as dangerous, and so teaching children how to browse the internet safely became the responsibility of teachers. Though parents set parental controls, they knew that it would not be difficult for children to bypass such restrictions. However, in most schools these lessons are not taught through a one-day workshop, but instead take place on a continual basis in the classrooms.

Some of these affluent schools also conduct safe internet browsing sessions for teachers, in order to train them in handling and advising the browsing habits of their students. These schools normally discourage parents from allowing their children (especially those below 14 years of age)[23] to become members of social media websites, especially Facebook. They see Facebook as a site that is not only distracting, but also potentially dangerous for young children, as they might be inadvertently exposing themselves on the space to antisocial elements and school bullies. Nevertheless they are pretty certain that several of their

students were on social media, especially Facebook.[24] These students do not just stop with signing onto Facebook, but also friend their teachers who are on the platform. However, such concerns about the internet and social media were only expressed orally, never made into an official regulatory policy by these schools. Very often these concerns were only conveyed to the parents during parent–teacher meetings.

The concerns that these schools had about social media also influenced how they categorised the internet and social media. While the teachers identify the internet and YouTube as a knowledge resource,[25] they categorically differentiated Facebook and other social media; to teachers these platforms were just frivolous, with no educational merit. They were thus shunned as distractions.[26] Such beliefs also influence the rules on accessing the internet from schools. These were usually simple: no access to websites other than Google and YouTube. Nor do the YouTube videos have the recommendations that normally come up while you are viewing one. In addition, the schools also ensure that advertisements do not pop up. Parental controls and other security features are normally enabled in the school labs. Yet even these were made concrete only after experiences such as Madhuvanthi's.

L. Madhuvanthi, 38, is a secondary school science teacher in an affluent school. In a computer lab session with her students she wanted her students to watch a YouTube documentary, but soon discovered a couple of students accessing Facebook from the school's computers. Immediately she had to shut down their access and coach them. She felt as the school did not have a firewall restricting such access, the students were always tempted to access social media sites during lab sessions. Only after a series of such complaints did the school take the serious step of restricting access to certain sites through firewalls; it also appointed a qualified lab administrator to keep a watchful eye on any students who circumvented firewalls in the computer labs. Several IT lab instructors in such schools agreed that firewall restrictions on their systems were sometimes lax, particularly with the restriction of access to social media sites. Even when these were in place, they noted that a few children always knew how to bypass them.

On the other hand, most of the less affluent schools did not have their computers connected to the internet. If they had a connection at all, it would be with one or two specific computers, which might also be under the supervision of the lab administrator or the teacher in charge.

For students in these less affluent schools, even owning gadgets was a luxury. With the government's policy of 'one laptop per child',

several secondary-school students from the lower socio-economic class now own laptops. These students either had no internet access or tethered it from a cheap smartphone that had internet access. However, this was only possible for male students;[27] female students accessed the internet for shorter periods of time by tethering from a borrowed phone (normally from their elder brothers or other relatives). Use of a USB dongle internet connection is now becoming a symbol of knowledge in itself, as it is immediately related to accessing the internet.[28] However, even in the use of such devices, gender-based controls were evident. As discussed in Chapter 2, access to social media for female students belonging to the lower socio-economic class was normally restricted or even banned by other family members.

As social media was not something that these less affluent schools had to handle systemically, they invariably never discussed this with parents. As a result the parents of these children (especially boys) more or less consent to the children's accessing of social media, perceiving social media to be one of visible symbols of technological advancement that requires mastery in the knowledge economy.

While ICT facilities in well-equipped affluent schools may entail watching a documentary on YouTube, it more or less equates to watching a DVD[29] in less affluent schools, which are not connected to the internet. While teachers at several less affluent schools were not aware of the existence of open source resources such as the Khan Academy, they did know that YouTube had educational elements to it, and sometimes encouraged students to view YouTube videos on their mobile phones. However, it was not a part of their curriculum and therefore no YouTube-based homework or project was assigned, as it was in affluent schools.

Several teachers from these less equipped schools remarked that their students would do very well if such opportunities were available to them. Possibly this mindset influences their perception of social media as well. It was evident that several teachers in these schools did not differentiate between the wider internet and social media; they viewed both equally as opportunities for their students to explore knowledge denied to them through economic circumstances. This was also visible in the way that teachers treated and encouraged students with even a little competence and knowledge of the internet and social media, although it might not be directly related to their curriculum. This is in sharp contrast to affluent schools' view of such distractions.

This distinction becomes clearly apparent in the case studies of Ranjith and Pandian. When during their physical training ativities the 'coach' (in Ranjith's case) and the physical training teacher (in Pandian's

case) saw the smartphones in their students' hands, their reactions were very different. While the coach sneered at the interruption that this phone could cause to Ranjith's session, the teacher in the local school that Pandian attends asked him for film songs. Though their reactions differed, it seems as if both now acknowledge the pervasive nature of such devices and the influence of social media on their students.

Accessing social media on mobile platforms

Though most school students operate and access social media through multiple devices (depending on their socio-economic background), smartphones seemed to be the most popular medium of access to the internet and social media.

All schools at Panchagrami have a strict 'no mobile phone' policy within their respective school premises and discourage students very strongly from bringing mobile phones to schools. However, teachers in both affluent and less affluent schools agree that they have caught numerous students with mobile phones within their respective school campuses.

As a disciplinary process, the school retains the mobile phone and lets the student know that the phone will be handed over only to his/her parents. This also creates an opportunity for the teachers to talk to the parents about such policies, and the issues that arise when they are broken. More often than not the teachers blame the parents for providing a child of 10 or 12 with a mobile phone. During the interviews for this book several teachers observed that this breach of rules normally happens with children whose parents (both father and mother) were working. According to teachers, the parents with a high disposable income seemed to shower their children with all kinds of gadgets in order to make up for the time they could not spend with them. In fact teachers in less affluent schools also complained of this, but here it was focused more upon male students, who sometimes received these phones from their extended families rather than directly from their parents (typically it was provided by an older male relative such as an uncle). But what differentiated these students from those of affluent backgrounds was that they owned second-hand non-smartphones, and sometimes also smartphones, while the children attending affluent schools generally owned new smartphones. In less affluent schools it was mostly the boys who got caught, while in affluent schools both boys and girls were caught with mobile phones. Certainly it appeared that children were caught in possession of mobile phones across all schools, irrespective of their affluence.

With the children in the affluent schools, the teachers rationalised that being attached to the device was a solution for a lonely child; for those whose parents were both working long hours, the phone seemed to interact with them more than their parents did. The phone or the iPad became an actual companion. Several younger children who ended up playing online games stated that these games kept them company while their parents were at work.

According to the teachers, gaming was one of the primary reasons why these children became attached to their mobile gadgets. Gaming takes places through several channels. Games could be downloaded as applications from the Google Play store, Apple's App Store or Samsung store. However, most parents also allow their children to sign up on Facebook, thus enabling them to play games on the platform. The teachers noted that the young children who sign up for Facebook only use the site for gaming purposes. Although they felt such social media memberships expose these children to unwanted distractions, the parents simply did not seem to mind their children being on Facebook.

One affluent school even carried out a surprise inspection of each student's school bags to see if someone was carrying a mobile phone, following a rumour that children were using mobile phones in silent mode during breaks for playing games and accessing social media, especially Facebook and WhatsApp. The inspection ended with 21 mobile phones being confiscated in the eleventh grade alone, which consists of 17 year olds. This led to stricter policies and rules being imposed. Although the schools hosted meetings of the parent–teacher association (PTA) and let the parents know of this, they noted that some parents just did not seem to care.

Regulation of mobile phones in less affluent schools happens too. They also have a 'no mobile phone' policy and, as seen earlier, students in these schools were also caught with mobile phones. In a few less affluent schools, however, even if teachers did see students bringing in mobile phones they did not make a fuss over it. These schools normally have students of the tenth to twelfth grades bringing in mobile phones, which are then caught by the teachers during inspections. While a few teachers might just confiscate these phones as a warning during surprise inspections, they also consider the student's economic background before imposing a monetary fine or instigating other disciplinary processes.

Sujatha, a teacher in one of these schools, recounted an incident from a PTA meeting. On this occasion the school had warned parents about the policy banning mobile phone usage within the school

premises. Parents were encouraged to check school bags and be on the lookout for children taking their mobile phones to school. Almost all parents seemed to have supported the school's stance. Yet within a couple of days, during a mid-morning break, two male students were caught talking on their mobile phones. When the phones were confiscated it was discovered that they had been talking to their mothers, asking them to deliver lunch at school. When the parents were summoned, they claimed ignorance of such a policy. Sujatha pointed out that several schools, including hers, had only made this as an oral policy and it was not written down, so claiming ignorance was easy. It is true that while some schools have a written policy on the use of mobile phones (banning their use within the school premises), most schools do not refer to it – nor do they express a view on social media. The prohibition of mobile phones was thus more of an unspoken/unwritten rule. Several teachers observed that while these rules did not need to be put in print, and it was just common sense to understand them, they expressed doubts over co-operation from parents when it came to following these rules.

Even in the case of affluent schools, with highly regulated policies banning mobile phones on school campuses, teachers often complained that these sometimes had no effect. This raises the question of children's autonomy, on why they choose to bring a mobile phone to school even when they knew it was prohibited. Several reasons for this emerged. Many children reasoned that they needed a mobile phone as this was the only way they could communicate with their parents (both working), childminder or other responsible adult at certain times of the day. Further, the kind of phone they carried helped them build a kind of social status among their peers that went beyond the opportunity for constant gaming. In fact a few secondary-school children even suggested that it was an act of rebellion against the authority of their parents and teachers.

On the positive side, the teachers acknowledge that such attachment to mobile phones has in a way helped these children to understand more about the intricacies and the mechanics of smartphones.

Kalpana, a systems administrator and a computer science teacher at one of the affluent schools, recounted that once when she had a problem with a new iPhone, she mentioned the issue to a pupil in class nine, aged around 15, who solved it for her within minutes. She was both surprised and proud of this student. She then found out that the child's parents had iPhones at home. When she casually mentioned this to the other teachers, word naturally got around to the school management.

Though the head of the school warned her against asking students to help with repairs of personal devices, Kalpana feels that teachers need to acknowledge the fact that children these days know a lot about phones and other gadgets. She says having internet access or a mobile phone is not necessarily a bad thing for children, and teachers needed to understand that neither can be avoided. She would prefer a holistic understanding of children's needs and backgrounds, so they can be taught how to use technology responsibly. This was her personal view, however, and none of the other teachers felt the same way – at least not at her school.

Teachers in both affluent and less affluent schools speak of technically competent students who may be able to handle and repair a range of smartphones and other varieties of phone. However, while stories of technical competence in less affluent schools would typically feature a student from the tenth or twelfth grades, aged around 16 to 18, such stories in a well-equipped affluent school would be about a child in the seventh or eighth grade, aged around 12 to 14. Such stories clearly reveal the knowledge gap between these school students in exposure to technology. In affluent schools, though individual teachers might encourage such competence, doing so as a regular thing is frowned upon and seen as a distraction. However, in less affluent schools with less sophisticated technology infrastructure, both the individual teacher and the system itself would regard this technical competence as a symbol of the technical knowledge required to thrive in modern Panchagrami. For example the teacher who asked Pandian for songs, in the case study discussed at the start of this chapter, views his expertise in downloading songs as a technical competence. Similarly the computer science teacher who got help in fixing a computer from Pandian's friend Deepak also sees this as a technical competence; no-one in these schools complains or frowns when teachers accept help from their students.

Irrespective of the schools' systems or their perception of mobile phones, internet access or even social media, it was apparent that the schools were extremely aware of the growing impact on their students of technology in general and social media in particular.[30] Having discussed above how schools view social media formally, we now move on to see what happens when students extend their relationship with teachers by friending them on Facebook. The following section explores how teachers view such friendships.[31] In other words, it considers whether teachers take students' friend requests as an affront to the traditional hierarchical power structure and discourage them, or whether they

welcome such acts as a sign of their students' technical competence, and so encourage such friending.

Social media: friending teachers

As seen in the earlier sections, several teachers knew that students in their early teens were on Facebook, a situation that troubled them since they did not think of Facebook as a site for children. Although they kept restating the Indian legal rule that children below the age of 18 years should not be allowed access to Facebook,[32] they acknowledged that banning the platform for children was not possible. Most seemed to have reluctantly come to terms with the reality facing them.

However, a couple of significant aspects soon became apparent. Many of the teachers who expressed such concerns were also friends with their students on Facebook, and though the schools had an informal policy of not encouraging teacher–student friendship outside the school premises, in reality none of the schools seemed too worried about what happened outside school. Nevertheless, the teachers did not appear comfortable discussing their Facebook friendship with their students within their school premises. The students who friended their teachers did it for a variety of reasons. Some did it to show off their closeness to power centres within their peer group, while others seemed genuinely interested in what was happening in their teachers' lives. Interviews carried out with a few students made this apparent.

For example, 14-year-old Rajeev, a student in the eighth grade of an affluent school, commented:

> I am a friend of Prema mam on Facebook. I told my classmates . . . they sent a request and became friends too. She posts little. She had gone on a trip to Malaysia . . . I saw the pictures on her album. The girls in my class liked her dress . . . the boys liked the theme park.

Varenya, a student in the ninth grade of another affluent school, explained:

> I greeted my teacher on her birthday when I friended her on Facebook and she liked my comment and I told this to my classmates . . . I never ended up greeting her when I saw her in school.

While Dhandapani, a tenth-grade student from a less affluent school, remarked:

> Only my computer science sir is on Facebook. I sent him a friend's request when I signed up on Facebook – my friend Arulraj asked me to friend him, as he was friends with him. My sir immediately accepted the request. I thanked him when I saw him at school the next day . . . he just smiled.

Though a few teachers who had their students as friends on Facebook seemed pretty conscious of their activities on the platform, there were others who did not appear to care. Some had even forgotten that their Facebook friends network also included their students. For example Manjula, a teacher of the eleventh grade in a CBSE school, said that she only remembered having friended one of her students on Facebook when the student had questioned her about the absence of recent updates. Others said that they maintained a close surveillance of the activities of their younger students (aged 14 or below) on the platform by becoming friends with them. This, they hoped, would exert some control over what their students post (both in terms of pictures and the language used). They agreed that if they saw something inappropriate they would either question the student about it directly or would refer to it indirectly.

This kind of surveillance and social control seemed the reason why the students in the higher grades avoided friending their teachers on Facebook. Many, especially male students, felt that such friendships would be an invasion of their privacy. Female students in these grades seemed more relaxed about friending their favourite teachers. A few even said that their teacher had sent them a friend's request and they had simply accepted it. Other students felt compelled to friend their teachers when they were a part of an event organised at school and informal co-ordination happened over Facebook. However, all of this depended on the school, the relationship that a student shared with his/her teacher, who a favourite teacher might be and his/her attitude to Facebook, the number of other students or classmates who were friends with their teacher on Facebook etc. In some cases students agreed that they experienced peer pressure to friend a teacher when their network of friends were also Facebook friends with him or her, and this trend was evident across schools.

While a few teachers were fine about friending all of their students, others were cautious of friending them, particularly those in

higher grades. Most teachers noted that they would be comfortable only if they knew the student well (i.e. had known the student for several years or had taught their class); in other cases they would have a look at a student's profile before accepting such requests. Several teachers also noted that they would be very wary of friending their students in the absence of a clear profile picture.

Karuna, 49, is a twelfth-grade English teacher in an affluent school. She had worked out a set of rules to apply in deciding whether to friend a student from her school. She had to know who they were and to gauge their attitude. Karuna seemed to have become more careful after an incident that involved a new male student who had recently arrived in the eleventh grade. She had encouraged students from her school to friend her on Facebook and as a result several of them had done so; this particular student did that too. After a few months she discovered that he had also friended her daughter, who was in her tenth grade, through Karuna's profile. She discovered this only after she had seen his comment on her daughter's picture. Though the student had started commenting and liking pictures of her daughter, she had at first considered it only a harmless friendship. However, shortly afterwards she realised that he had unfriended Karuna but was still friends with her daughter. Karuna was also shocked when she came across another comment of this student on her daughter's profile, which she considered bordering on lewdness. She had immediately asked her daughter to unfriend him. She could not raise the matter with the school head, however, as the school had actively discouraged personal social media contacts between teachers and students.

Though this might have been a one-off case, teachers were generally sceptical and careful when it came to friending students of higher grades due to privacy issues and concerns arising on both sides. However, teachers of lower grades were keen and actively encouraged students to friend them. This was in part their way of ensuring that the students did not get into any trouble on Facebook, and that no cyber bullying was taking place.

Children studying in affluent schools in this area very often come from 'double-income' families in which both parents work. After school they either stay at home with their grandparents or in some cases return to an empty house. With unrestricted internet access and plenty of tech gadgets around, it is no wonder that several children sign up on Facebook at an early age. Although most begin their Facebook journey by playing online games, very soon they start connecting with their peer

groups on Facebook. This is also the point at which they start friending their teachers. Rahul's case illustrates this clearly.

This is another example of a family that inhabits two different apartments within the same complex, as discussed in Chapter 4. Rahul, a 15-year-old student, attends an affluent school at Panchagrami. After school he generally stays at his grandparents' apartment until his parents return home late in the evening, during which time he says he feels lonely. His lack of friends in the apartment complex contributes to this. Rahul attributes his lack of friends to his varied interests and, since he is not as interested in sport as he is in computers, he feels that none share his passion. Further, he does not go to the same school as most other children in the complex (in this case the school run by the apartment complex itself), which makes him feel like an outsider. Conscious of his loneliness and lack of friends, his grandparents seem worried. They are now pressing Rahul's parents to move him to the school in the apartment complex itself, hoping that at least then he would have more friends and some physical activity.

Rahul's grandmother was pretty frank about his activities once he returns from school. The first thing he does is to switch on his laptop and his Samsung Galaxy notepad and start playing games, and this goes on until his parents are return. In practice, therefore, Rahul is on a gaming platform for at least four hours every evening. Otherwise he is on Facebook, chatting with his school friends as he plays these games.

Rahul was also pretty open about his interests in gaming and networking on Facebook at the same time. He updated his friends on his scores and, most often, played games online with his other school friends (whose parents also typically seemed to be still at work). He had a WhatsApp account activated on his Samsung smartphone and through this communicated with his gaming friends group. Rahul had his Facebook account activated a year ago, which he claims was done by his friend from school. One of the first things he did on Facebook was to search for his schoolmates, and he appeared happy to have found most of them on this platform. Once he knew that several of his teachers were friends of his friends, he wanted to friend them as well and started sending them friend requests. While still in ninth grade, he had sent a request to a teacher of the twelfth grade; he was friended immediately, even though he did not know her personally and had not attended any of her classes. Rahul claims that almost all of his schoolmates and teachers have friended him within hours of him sending the request, and now reckons that all of them spend more time on Facebook than he did. So, as he keeps asking his grandmother and parents, why should he move out

of Facebook when everyone else seems to be on it? His mother even went so far as to call his teachers hypocrites; they advised parents to discourage children from using Facebook, but at the same time friended their students on it. She described such an approach as 'pinching the baby and rocking the cradle'.

However, it soon became clear that Rahul's parents were actually encouraging him to be on Facebook; they claimed that all his cousins who lived abroad used it and he should be using it as well, to feel a part of his extended family. His mother even claimed that Indian schools needed to grow up! She is pretty forthright in stating that the schools need either to recognise that students use social media or to take a firm line and actively ban it. She did not agree with a policy of advising parents to keep their children off social media while simultaneously friending a student if a friend request is sent. Rahul's father was also vocal in claiming that the schools were only bothered about what happened within their premises, thus contradicting their idealistic claims of a holistic education.

However, the case in less affluent schools seems to be very different. Here even teachers of higher grades actively encouraged students to friend them on social media, which was seen as a way of encouraging students to explore new horizons. Once again, the issue of gender arose; it was mostly male students who were on social media, especially Facebook. In less affluent schools interviews with several female students of the eighth to the twelfth grade revealed that they were not on social media, either because of economic circumstances or through restrictions exerted by their families.

Ramesh, a twelfth-grade student attending a Tamil-medium school in Panchagrami, signed up on Facebook three years ago. He had helped a few of his classmates sign up on Facebook as well, and had also spoken about his Facebook account to a couple of his male teachers, who wanted Ramesh to create accounts for them too. As news of his technical competence on Facebook spread, requests from other teachers for Facebook accounts started to pour in. Very soon Ramesh's image as a tech geek started to take shape. He was seen as someone who knew more about the internet and computers than his teachers did. Though he previously wanted to be a Tamil scholar, his success with Facebook and his rising personal status as a tech geek has influenced Ramesh's choice of a career in computer science.

In affluent schools, while friending on Facebook was still fine, precautions were taken among both teachers and students when it came to WhatsApp. The teachers were not really keen on passing on their phone

numbers to students, a feeling that seemed to be mutual. Teachers were apprehensive, not only about the students' use of mobile phones but also, to a very large extent, on the parents calling teachers and bothering them about their children's performance at school. WhatsApp did not therefore seem to be a particularly liked or favoured channel of interaction between teachers and their students.

For most school students from the lower socio-economic class – though their teachers (mostly men) were far more open to exchanging their phone numbers – use of WhatsApp becomes limited due to the cost of mobile internet access. Even for those who subscribe to the mobile internet, their use of WhatsApp largely depends on who on their network was using it. Only when these students moved on to college did it become a major communication channel. However, in the last phases of the field work this seemed to be changing, with many more male students from lower classes adopting WhatsApp as a communication platform.

Exploring the student–teacher relationship on social media is crucial, since it is only now that this relationship is being tested in a space that breaks down the traditional hierarchy of this relationship. As seen above, it is still in the process of being tested. It was apparent that both students and teachers were careful and apprehensive when it came to revealing their personal lives, something seldom seen in a formal school environment. There also seemed to be an inherent tension in the relationship between parents and teachers, at least when it came to their children's social media activities. However, the relationship between parents and schools on social media is also crucial – since the very set of affluent parents who expressed anxiety about their child's activity on social media also view Facebook as a convenient platform for staying in touch with the schools and influencing them.

Social media and parent–teacher associations (PTA)

Subhashini, aged 37, is the mother of two children who study in an affluent school at Panchagrami. The elder, aged 11, is in the sixth grade and the younger, aged 8, is in the third. Subhashini and her husband had returned from the US a couple of years earlier, after having lived there for nearly eight years. Once her children were admitted to the school in Panchagrami, she wanted to take an active part in its parent–teacher association. However, she soon found that there were limitations in India, in contrast to her involvement in school PTAs in the US. She also

found that while the parents were individually involved and invested in the education of their children, it was not a united association.

Instead Subhashini set up two Facebook groups, each of which involved parents from her children's respective grades. The groups were specifically intended to discuss and debate any changes in the way in which education in these schools was supposed to happen. Further, they were also intended to discuss their children's homework and future events, and to arrange get-togethers. Though the group was active when it started, it soon became a place where the mothers gossiped and discussed their cooking and sarees. Bad-mouthing a few teachers of this school also occurred. Subhashini felt that the focus changed because this was a mothers-only group. She knew that there were other Facebook groups in which both parents participated, and those seemed to function well.

The school's head teacher soon recognised that several groups of parents had formed Facebook groups to discuss their children's schooling, and a few of them had genuine concerns. As it was difficult to address these concerns when they were expressed in disparate channels, regulation of such groups became necessary. She actively encouraged parents such as Subhashini to form one Facebook group that had a high-level parent–teacher committee, and to have several teachers as school representatives in this group. In this way communication could be channelled and concerns proactively addressed. This soon became a reality, with Subhashini taking over as one of the group administrators. She feels that this group has much more regulation and has created a sense of community. Several members have also taken to passing information through WhatsApp rather than through Facebook alone. This group now seems to have spawned several subgroups. Among these are a group of mothers (specifically homemakers) who bring lunch to their children at school, a fathers' cricket group (which involves cricket with a group of children every Saturday) and a mentor group (which involves the corporate fathers mentoring children for success through life skills etc). These groups are active on both Facebook and WhatsApp.

The school for its part encourages only one online channel of communication, as well as the monthly face-to-face meetings to help address concerns. While it encourages communication over Facebook, therefore, it strongly discourages communication over WhatsApp – for which teachers' personal phone numbers need to be exchanged, possibly requiring them to respond to queries from parents outside school hours. From the school's point of view, formalising such online communication channels encourages healthy debates on educational practice and the

curriculum. It also regulates and restricts any 'blame game' activity and the questioning of individual teachers.

Alternative social media: a case study from an affluent school

In exploring cases of how schools discourage children from using social media, the situation becomes complex when we consider the most affluent schools. These schools have recognised the contemporary need not to keep the children away from social media, but to ensure that they use it responsibly and avoid being caught up in embarrassing, awkward, unhealthy or dangerous situations. These schools realise the benefits of a common forum for interaction among their constituencies and are experimenting with different ways of creating such interactive platforms. This can be illustrated through the case study of a very affluent school, located very close to the field site. Several children from the affluent families of Panchagrami study there.

DMG is one of the new breed of affluent international schools that have appeared in the area. The brainchild of an entrepreneurial family, who compose the senior management of the school, it has been in existence for about two decades. During that time it has metamorphosed from being a conventional school following the local curriculum to its current form as a school following an international curriculum. International schools in India differ from regular schools in the curriculum they follow, which may be either country-specific (for example an American International School) or global (for example IGCSE or IB). To meet the demands of these curricula requires a different approach to education from other domestic schools. The overall approach is geared towards nurturing the different facets of a child's development including cognition, emotional responses, sensory growth, kinaesthetic awareness and interpersonal communication. To achieve such multi-faceted development, the school relies on a variety of pedagogical approaches, ranging from activity-based learning (learning through class activities, presentations and exhibitions), peer-to-peer mentoring (in which older students often address younger ones about social and civic issues such as bullying, waste management etc.) and extensive use of ICT.

The use of ICT is especially visible in this school. All the classrooms are connected to the internet through smart boards and computer terminals, and there is also a fully equipped computer lab (for hands-on

use by the children) plus internet-linked computers in the staff room (mainly for staff to use for their own research and occasional teaching to a smaller group of students). As well as students researching on the internet for their classroom projects, teachers are encouraged to engage in virtual research for drawing up their lesson plans, preparing assessment questions and devising worksheets for classroom purposes. Communication of important news to parents is almost exclusively through e-mails to the students' school e-mail accounts (each student has his/her own school e-mail ID), while group mailers to the staff are often also through e-mail.

A new initiative in the ICT sphere in this school is an online assessment tool (created in-house by the school director and external colleagues). This attempts to make online testing and formative assessment easier and more intuitive for both teachers and students. One set of members of staff that are exploring ICT to the fullest are the team of special educators who help children with different needs, both in the regular classroom and in the specialised resource centre catering for children with special needs. These teachers have found ICT to be the ideal platform for providing different sensorial experiences to children who do not respond well to traditional oral teaching methods. ICT also helps such teachers to keep abreast of the latest happenings in their fields of expertise, and more effectively to research pedagogy for students not served by the regular curriculum.

In the school itself ICT complements classroom-based pedagogy that relies a lot on activities to stimulate learning and reflection. These activities range from session-long intra-class activities (such as debates, presentations and so on) to exhibitions and project work of longer duration (ranging from a couple of days to a month). One of the main activities is the school-wide, two-day exhibition on a common theme, preparations for which begin weeks beforehand. These activities are showcased to the outside world through regular updates on the school's Facebook page, drawing comments and likes from regular visitors including alumni and ex-teachers.

This international school has created its own intranet social networking website that aims to give the experience of a public social networking site in a controlled environment. 'Relate', as the website is called, is open only to the staff and students of the school; entry is controlled by the school through login usernames and passwords. Further, as the school provides every student with an email ID when admitted, the sign-up site is accessed through this email ID. It works as a forum for students and teachers to interact with and among one another for

academic and social purposes. The site mimics the layout of Facebook, allowing each user to post on a wall, 'friend' other members, create groups and forums and start chat conversations. However, usage is carefully monitored, with a prominent notice informing members of the appropriate 'etiquette' to be followed in the site and the consequences of breaching rules of conduct.

The main objective of this internal social networking site is to make sure that children, especially those in fifth to ninth grade, receive coaching and instruction on how to use an external social networking site such as Facebook responsibly. Further, the management and teachers view this simulation of a social networking site as a two-way learning experience, in which both sides gain knowledge through ICT.

Students and teachers use this website in different ways and for various purposes. Social greetings for festivals or other holidays are common among students. Staff members also 'friend' other members of staff and have social interactions on this site. Teachers also use the website to comment on curricular events, such as projects and exhibitions conducted by the students. In turn, students conduct polls on issues of interest among other students and teachers, giving them a taste of the democratic process. Last but not least, homework assignments have also been posted on the site for students to complete, with immediate clarifications made possible through chat with the respective faculty members. Along with facilitating interactions among members, 'Relate' also allows users to post videos (mostly educational and only posted by teachers), appropriate photographs (posted by students and teachers) and links to external sources such as websites and blogs.

However, as the management themselves agree, though 'Relate' is open for all students from the fifth grade upwards, and is completely voluntary, they see it being used more by middle-school children than older students. Further, there seems to be a difference in the pattern of how the girls use the site compared to the boys. Most postings on Relate by girl students were related to paintings and creative design, while those by boys leaned towards sports such as football, basketball and even baseball.

The sign-in page of this networking site is shown in Fig. 6.1 below.

Extensive usage of ICT has also challenged the school's IT team, which is now scrambling to keep pace with ICT-related challenges such as cyber bullying, posting of inappropriate pictures and other media on the common social networking platform and general use of the internet for purposes other than classroom or education-related research.

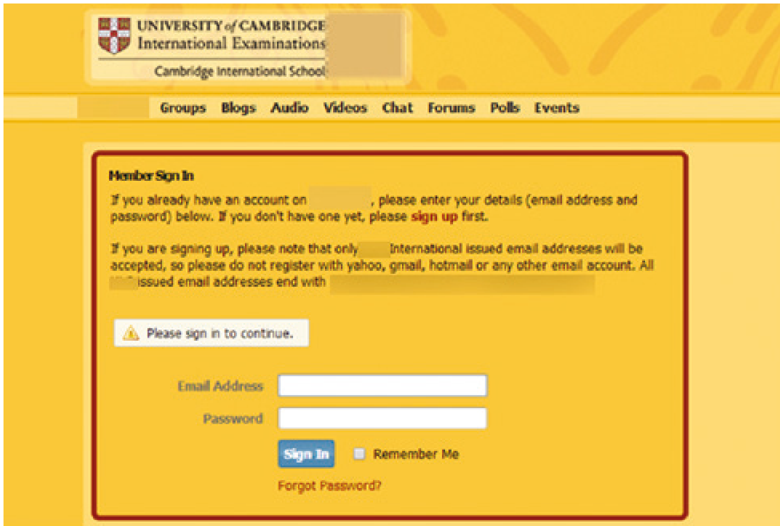


Fig. 6.1 The log-in page of an intraschool networking site

Conclusion

This chapter started by considering the two seemingly disparate case studies of Ranjith and Pandian. However, viewing the same case studies again, with a deeper understanding of how the macro-structure of education and other socio-economic factors influence this seemingly micro-level use of social media in everyday life, reveals the issues underlying the exploration. To comprehend these fully the diversity of schools in the area, ranging from expensive, fee-paying affluent schools to free government schools serving the lowest-income migrant workers from other states, had to be reviewed. We can now see why this introduction was so important, since almost every aspect of social media use in the school system seems to differ systematically along this spectrum, from the most cosmopolitan schools to the most local. The use of social media in this context reflects the attitudes not only of teachers but also of pupils, as well as the expectations and aspirations of parents. In turn this reflects the wider context of a field site in which the imposition of a new IT complex also reflects a top-down imposition of ideas – as indeed does a 'knowledge economy' itself. Even if these are at times poorly understood, it is clear that all sectors of the population, even those with the lowest incomes, recognise that their children's futures will be enhanced if somehow education can also mean access to technology and

skills related to IT. In a sense everyone at Panchagrami has embraced the concept of a knowledge economy at some level or other.

In this chapter we have also explored the implications that this has on the presence of social media in schools, starting from the attitude that these schools have towards mobile phones and access to technologies and progressing to personal connections on social media between teachers and students. The categorisation of social media and technology as useful educational tools, and as distractions by some teachers, also had to be considered in order to understand why the teachers in affluent schools frowned upon certain social media, while those working in less affluent schools encouraged its use.[33] This kind of categorisation was also apparent in how the students' parents viewed social media. While parents from lower socio-economic classes who sent their children to the less affluent schools saw their child's engagement with social media as an exhibition of a technical competence needed to survive in the knowledge economy that Panchagrami had grown into, upper middle-class parents viewed social media as a distraction to education. This is in a way similar to how social media was viewed in the respective schools that their children attended.

However, it was evident that the idea of understanding and handling social media was still a confusing mix throughout the school system. None of the schools had a clearly defined social media policy and, although some had an internet policy, there was no mention of social media. Rules regarding social media were constantly in flux, as the schools grappled with the ever-changing issues it raised. Finally, while all schools acknowledged the inescapable, pervasive presence of social media, not everything was discussed proactively and acted upon by these schools.

While some students were friending teachers on Facebook, in affluent schools anxiety, confusion and caution were common among teachers with respect to friending students, or even asking them for technical help. In less affluent schools, on the other hand, friending on social media was encouraged and even acted upon. The business of friending teachers was more visible among the middle school students, aged between 12 and 15; older students hesitated to do so, due to concerns about constant surveillance.[34] Such concerns were much more apparent in the case of WhatsApp, with both parties reluctant to connect since that involved exchanging personal phone numbers. Such reservations were also visible in the schools' practice of discouraging teachers from sharing phone numbers with students' parents, fearing possible disturbance and invasion of privacy.

Privacy in these cases was layered, based on the social media in question. Whereas Facebook was still viewed as a legitimate platform for official institutional communication, WhatsApp was seen as a private channel and was consequently discouraged, since it allowed one-to-one interaction with teachers.[35] While Facebook and WhatsApp seemed to be the platforms most discussed within these circles, Twitter appeared virtually invisible, with the exception of one very affluent international school. However, even this school used Twitter along with other platforms. Twitter was not as popular as Facebook or WhatsApp among students in affluent schools, a trend that differs from the use of Twitter among students in the UK field site, The Glades.[36]

In addition, while friending between genders was apparent in affluent schools, only male teachers friended male students in the less affluent schools – the result of socio-cultural issues surrounding female students' access to social media or even mobile phones. The deeper we probe, the more we realise that schools' perceptions about social media are relative to the socio-cultural aspects of a wider society, which in turn influence the schools themselves.

Most significant is the process by which the schools handle these apparently relative perceptions of social media, often by adopting contradictory practices. The last case study of a social media platform that an affluent school had created for its students is noteworthy. In this instance an affluent school that actually discourages, cautions and frowns upon its younger students using social media has ended up creating another social media platform strategically to combat and drive their students away from Facebook. In contrast less affluent schools, though they encourage and support social media, do not have the economic resources required to create a new platform for their use. The striking contradiction that emerges here is the use of social media by systems of education that frown upon it, juxtaposed with the non-use of social media by systems of education that in reality support it.

In conclusion, social media is an unprecedented development which schools are coming to terms with by constantly testing and experimenting with it. They all seem to be handling it in their own style, which in reality is relative to the socio-cultural scenario in which they are embedded – as was very apparent in the cases of Ranjith and Pandian.

7
Conclusion: social media and its continuing complexities

Sundararajan, a 57-year-old dealer in auto spare parts, is from an upper caste, upper middle-class Hindu background. He owns a couple of two-bedroom apartments in one of the multi-storeyed apartment complexes in Panchagrami. His intention was to rent out one of his apartments, but only to an upper-caste, strictly vegetarian Hindu. Initially Sundararajan tried the classified section in the local newspapers, but he was not happy with the responses he received. He later met with a few upper-caste Hindu neighbours in the same apartment complex and asked them to post his rental ad on their networks on Facebook and WhatsApp. A couple of months later, Sundararajan noted in an interview that he received around ten inquiries from upper-caste vegetarian Hindus in response to his neighbours' postings, and managed to rent his apartment successfully to someone he liked. He commented that he was not surprised by the response, since he knew that all his neighbours socialised mostly with upper-caste Hindus, and had reckoned that their networks on Facebook and WhatsApp would be much the same.

Sundararajan's casual observation was confirmed through both interviews and an online visual analysis of upper-caste Hindus' profiles. On average 58 per cent of their friends and contacts were from their own communities. Though online friendships with others did occur, most were with people whom they already knew offline. When this was brought up during interviews, some were surprised, others were shocked and yet others rationalised this pattern. But almost everyone agreed that while their offline social circles comprised people of other castes too, the majority were people from their own communities.

These connections married a caste-based community to an emergent class factor with which it was aligned. Interviews revealed that

even within their own caste, their primary contacts were with others from the middle classes. Where there were contacts from lower classes, these were limited and most tended to be functional rather than social.[1] For example if someone was in touch with their cook, who was from their own caste, on WhatsApp (such as Kavitha in Chapter 5, who sent WhatsApp voice messages to her cook/childminder), this was so they could discuss what needed to be cooked for dinner. It was not really a social process of establishing a peer-to-peer friendship, which involved forwarding jokes, memes and other visuals intended as a part of building sociality.

Such a pattern was also visible in the social media contacts of Panchagrami's long-term residents. Their contacts, even from within their own villages, mostly were from their own socio-economic class. Strategic use of their networks, as in the case of Sundararajan, was also evident; in Chapter 5, for example, we explored how Darshan and Naga, two young men from the lower socio-economic class, used their online networks to secure jobs for youngsters of their community in the lower echelons of the IT sector. While Sundararjan's use of his network was for purely personal ends, the use of networks by Darshan and Naga was geared towards helping the aspirations and development of their community.[2] Yet both ended up using their networks to serve their own purposes.

Apart from class or caste, other forms of online network homophily[3] also exist. However, these tend to be the result of more of an unconscious choice influenced by offline contacts. Such network homophily reinforces a sense of 'online otherness', where each group views everyone else as an 'other'. The socio-cultural dynamics of Panchagrami, as seen in Chapter 1, automatically contribute to this concept of 'otherness', in a context where most interactions arise out of in-group associations. Interactions between the upper middle-class IT/non-IT workers and the long-term village residents (irrespective of their class) are transactional – interactions that could happen in the market place over buying and selling, for example. This trend continued online too. Although the 'otherness' is not demonstrated explicitly, the in-group associations automatically lead to it.

While social continuity[4] in India (as seen in Chapter 1) has been explored in rural and urban spaces, this book explores such continuity between the offline and online space; the context for this exploration is a space that is in transition from a rural to an urban landscape.

In a way this also corresponds to the initial setup of the field site itself, which offered two distinct categories: namely the newer IT residents and the long-term resident villagers.

The first chapter provided the background to the area in which the study is situated – a place that has seen a radical juxtaposition of the infrastructure to sustain a massive knowledge economy with a traditional rural space dominated by agriculture. Panchagrami is now undergoing massive changes, not only in infrastructure, but also with respect to other socio-economic factors. These create the basis for a complex situation, characterised by dynamism and change – one where tradition meets modernity and the local meets the global.

While informal and indirect classifications based on class exist between the incoming residents, who primarily comprise the workforce of the IT companies and their associated services, and the long-term resident villagers, people in Panchagrami are also categorised by the traditional endogamous category of caste.[5] As shown in the first chapter, this category of caste comprises different dimensions, for example endogamous marriage practices, occupational hierarchies etc., which have long been studied by anthropologists.[6] Today caste also incorporates a whole series of government labels (Other Castes, Backward Castes, Other Backward Castes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) and ordering principles that have been placed alongside the more traditional categories and labels.

The ethnography suggests that social media has become a series of platforms through which such social categories or divisions manifest themselves. Rather than a progressive emancipation from such social categories, we more commonly observe their reassertion online.

The first chapter dealt with the traditional social categories of long-term residents in the village. The general rise in the economic prosperity of these long-term residents (due to property and land deals), along with their proximity to the IT sector, changing aspirations and the greater affordability of communication technologies have naturally led to an increased use of phones[7] (both non-smartphones and smartphones) and social media by this group. Their usage is consequently closer to the practices of the IT sector than to villagers in other regions.

The first chapter also revealed the IT sector as an ecosystem[8] that encompasses several occupational categories, ranging from highly skilled IT employees to semi-skilled workers to drivers and office maintenance staff, which in itself provides employment opportunities for various socio-economic groups. When people belonging to these diverse occupational classes move into the area and settle alongside long-term residents, the result is a dynamic interplay between different social categories and their use of social media. Chapter 2 thus provided details on the history of social media and the use of social media by the various groups at Panchagrami.

By this point it is already clear that in Panchagrami a discussion of social media will always involve a complicated mixture of at least caste and class. Contrary to expectations that saw social media as a potential panacea creating equality, or at least digital equality, there is little evidence that social media at Panchagrami offers equality of any kind, social or digital. While the increased affordability of communication technologies has offered most people (at least most men) the chance to be on social media, i.e. there is an equality of presence, simply to be present on social media does not necessarily lead to any wider equality. This general observation that online equality does not lead to offline equality is common to many of our field sites.[9]

Unlike some other field sites, however, issues of affordability remain pertinent for this site. As discussed in Chapter 2, while affordable pre-paid data cards have allowed even those from the lower socio-economic class to access social media, in practice these groups spend their pre-paid ('pay as you go') monthly internet bandwidth in the first 20–22 days, and therefore go without any internet connection for the last eight to ten days of a month. Similarly, approximately 84 per cent of this group's postings are done in the first 15 days following a recharge of their pay-as-you-go plan. The time cycle of their internet recharge coincides, not surprisingly, with their monthly pay cycle. For the lower socio-economic classes, therefore, even a presence on social media on all the days of the month cannot be taken for granted.

Chapters 2 to 6 also presented clear evidence that most interaction through social media occurs *within* the different socio-economic groups and not *between* them. This becomes apparent when we observe the kind of interactions that take place between the middle/upper middle class and the lower classes. As discussed earlier, these are mostly transactional and functional, not intended for socialisation. Not many upper middle-class individuals encouraged their driver or cook to forward them jokes, irrespective of the caste from which the latter came, as was apparent in the apprehension felt by Sindhu in receiving a message from her male domestic help (Chapter 2). Though this might initially appear to be a gender issue, class plays an important role as well. In Kavitha's case, interacting with her cook/childminder, who was from her own caste, illustrated that class influences the kind of communication (functional or social) even in intra-caste communications. As the gap between the classes increases, irrespective of the caste group, communication on social media becomes more functional rather than social.

While it may look like the continuity from offline to online space, influenced by caste and class, is pronounced through network

homophily, in fact the same social categories, coupled with kinship, help us see the common threads of activities and responses (such as their visual culture, network conformance etc.) on social media by the people of Panchagrami. In a way this is influenced by a deeper Tamil culture, leading us to see commonalities rather than similarities between the different social categories – or between the supergroups of IT workers and long-term villagers. So the conclusion that on social media people largely keep within their established social groups does not preclude a separate conclusion that there is a surprising degree of commonality with respect to how people, across the whole spectrum of caste and class, have been impacted by social media. Thus the ethnography also shows fewer differences in the use of social media between the professionals in the IT sector and villagers than was originally predicted.

One of the most apparent commonalities in social media postings between these groups is their devotion to two public genres for which Tamil Nadu is well known, namely cinema and politics. This becomes clear from the analysis of their visual postings on Facebook in Chapter 3. The upper socio-economic classes constantly share posts on cinema, which they might describe on their pages as 'intelligent' articles on cinema and political news, and sometimes as political satire. The lower middle and lower socio-economic classes tend to be more explicit about their passion for cinema and politics by posting visuals of their favourite actor or actress, or images of the political party they support, on Facebook. Further, these groups generally tend to be more explicit when it comes to posting political satires in the form of trolling on their Facebook pages.

Chapter 3 also revealed other visual genres, which have easily migrated from prior offline precedents. For example the commonality in posting pictures of themselves was spread across all social classes.[10] This was explored through both solo portfolio images as well as through group images. Irrespective of the classes, the pictures posted by women tended to follow certain conservative social norms with respect to clothing and posing for pictures. Mixed gender posing by single men and women for social media photographs most often involved a group rather than a couple. Even in the upper middle class, posing in pairs was accepted only if the parents knew of the offline friendships of their children, and were sure that it was not a romantic relationship.

Another common theme is the development of an offline practice of offering good wishes to people into an online form of daily greetings such as good morning or good night – usually accompanied by scenic or religious images. While some saw this as part of building sociality

online, others connected it to building karma points and expressing positivity in their lives.

What was also evident was how much the visuals conformed to their networks' expectations. The posting of neutral images, such as greetings or images that do not necessarily express dissent, was frequently found on users' Facebook profiles, as well as in communication with different groups on WhatsApp. Understanding the necessity for social conformance and non-confrontation with their networks, people also strategically crafted their visual communication, as seen in the cases of Jyotsna and Sagayam. Even if they wanted to express dissent, most expressed it through private chats or through silence (in which *not* commenting or liking on the post becomes a response). As seen in Chapter 2, one way of expressing dissent and opinions contrary to the normative expectations was through the use of multiple profiles or fake identities. All these diverse selves were authentic for these users, coming together to form their identity.

The dominating field of communication at Panchagrami – one that cuts right across all groups – is that of kinship. This was evident in Chapters 5 and 6, but more specifically in Chapter 4, which focused on communication within the immediate and extended family. The true essence of multiple media covered in this chapter reveals another example of tradition manifesting itself through these modern tools of communication. Hierarchy based on age, the formal relationship that one family member holds with another, the nature of the media itself, the placement of each member in the kinship system – all contribute to determining the medium of communication one has to choose to communicate within a family circle. While the closest family, and especially communication with elders, might still warrant voice-based communication (due to various factors including age, hierarchy, literacy, love etc.), we see from the cases of Raghavan, Ravi's mother, Shobana, Lakshmi and Rahul and Sukrithi's parents that communication with extended family has moved to family-based WhatsApp groups. This might shift to communication over Facebook when the purpose is to inform a wider kin network (and others) about events in the family, although people like Raghavan feel these changes are impersonal and disrespectful to the elderly.

What happens between kin networks is a complex interplay among the concepts of polymedia[11], scalable sociality[12] and media multiplexity,[13] as seen in Chapter 4. Social media, especially Facebook, seems to act as a performative medium (through likes and comments) where family

members come together in order to perform and portray an image of a unified and ideal family to their wider network of friends on Facebook. However, this is not actually a reflection of the *familial* use of social media. Facebook is used as a strategic, outward-facing tool with a performative role; it is not given the same importance as WhatsApp for communication within the family. It is therefore not surprising that Raghavan shows anger when Facebook is used for intra-family communication.

Within family circles, the role of Facebook as a public, less intimate medium for intra-family communication is seen in the different rationale expressed with respect to certain intimate postings. For example some postings exhibit a more traditional rationale, such as avoiding posting pictures of a new baby on Facebook until at least a couple of months after its birth, for fear of attracting the evil eye. During this time, however, pictures of a newborn baby are shared privately over WhatsApp. Although Facebook might reach extended kin, it is still public, and therefore the perceived fear of it also reaching non-kin networks and of visibility to a wider world poses a problem. Such a fear is absent in the case of WhatsApp, however, which explains the preference for the latter.

We can also see how traditional and normative order is re-established through new media. This was specifically visible on the impact that it had on gender norms. A constant surveillance or imposing of restrictions upon women accessing social media by kin and family circles was in effect influenced by caste-based ideals and normative discourses. Fear of inter-caste marriages and romance was prevalent in the lower middle and lower socio-economic classes, influencing their members to restrict young, unmarried female relatives from accessing phones and social media. Restrictions were of various kinds. Some took hard forms through surveillance and the outright banning of mobile phones and social media usage, while others allowed the use of social media only within the safe space of women's homes and further controlled it through time-restricted access.

Space, both physical and online, here assumes a masculine form. The idea of banning social media is based on a perception that social media is a masculine space;[14] accessing it exposes young women to unwanted distractions and may bring family honour into disrepute. The same idea may also be applied to physical space: inside one's home is assumed to be safe, whereas outside the home is perceived as a masculine space, and thus dangerous for young women wanting to access social media. Such a concept also in a way extends to time-based

restrictions on social media access. The idea that young women should not access social media after 8 pm or 9 pm is also governed by a perception that after that time they could be exploited. Here the intersection of both time and space assumes a masculine form.

Such restrictions do not allow women from these social groups onto social media. This has an indirect effect on young men of these groups, in a way driving network heterogeneity and increasing friendships across class and caste. Traditionally the search for cross-gender contacts and relationships was very localised, involving people you might otherwise see in everyday life offline. But the effect of social media has been to create a kind of force field, throwing these men out from the traditional centre into a wider circle of contacts. As attempts to friend local women are unsuccessful, young men look further, to their educational institutions or workplaces, or even other states and countries, to find less conservative women. They may never speak a word to them offline, but they can express friendship and feel less shy in this more private space of social media.

Though the activities of the different classes on social media might seem distinct from each other, all of them commonly use social media to gain respectability and maintain their family honour. While the upper middle class may do this through performing as an ideal family unit on social media, members of the lower middle class and the lower socio-economic class believe that they can best maintain family honour by restricting young female relatives in their access to social media.

Also significant in the way people addressed each other on social media was the use of fictive kin terms. The concept of fictive kin spans all socio-economic groups. While addressing friends in fictive kin terms is a common practice, both online and offline, addressing relatives as friends was also seen among the middle classes. Both tend to be influenced by normative discourses on kinship and friendship in the larger Tamil society.

Chapter 5 made explicit a core theme of this study, showcasing how social media has radically challenged the boundaries of work and non-work and constantly undermined them. While taking work home is seen as a social conformance to expectations of the modern workplace, managing non-work matters at work is generally viewed with disapproval. However, such ‘dissent’ actually conforms to the historical ideology of work in south India, where traditionally such boundaries did not exist; constant interactions with the non-work space were considered a part of everyday sociality. Historically any such dichotomy in an Indian context was never as rigidly imposed across the world of work as it may have

been in other regions. This is manifested through a paradox in the work system, which allows for work–non-work boundaries to be constantly redrawn through opportunities for circumventing such impositions.

This discussion of work and non-work boundaries is situated in the context of the sudden transformation of Panchagrami: what had been a traditional agricultural setting was developed to meet the needs of the modern formal workplace. A complex interplay between caste and kinship (fictive kin) occurs in the search for lower ranking positions in the modern work environment. The role of social media in such a process (recruiting, communication etc.) was discussed in Chapter 5. While this may particularly be the case for lower-class socio-economic groups, the role of social media in facilitating constant communication between the work and non-work spheres throughout the day, and so undermining the work and non-work boundaries for higher-class socio-economic groups, was also examined with respect to kinship in Chapter 5. Although this works in a different manner for long-term villagers and professional IT workers, the general way in which people use social media to oppose recent attempts to separate work from non-work is common to all communities.

Issues of hierarchy, which featured prominently in Chapter 4, also manifested themselves in Chapter 6, which was concerned with school education. Here we find social media exposing tensions in how both teachers and students understand and orient themselves to these new media for social communication. The uncertainty and ambivalence over how to align the traditional hierarchy of a teacher–student relationship with the new situation of being a 'friend' on Facebook were issues of concern for schools at Panchagrami. Attitudes and responses vary between the diverse socio-economic groups and also between different school administrations. For the affluent schools that cater to the higher socio-economic class groups, the prevailing concern is whether social media might be a distraction to their students. For the less affluent schools that cater to the lower socio-economic class groups, however, technology and social media are both symbols of social mobility; they hope that proficiency in both within a knowledge economy will lead to prosperity.

As a result, teachers in the less affluent schools view friending students on social media as a visible encouragement of their students' aspirations. For a student from a lower socio-economic class background, friending a teacher might lead to showcasing his/her own intelligence, thus gaining him/her approval in the classroom. For students and teachers in affluent schools, however, friending each other might lead to a lack of privacy due to the breakdown of established hierarchy. For both

schools this is a fluid and rapidly changing area, leading to a continual testing of waters in both directions.

This chapter on education effectively reinforces findings discovered throughout the ethnography. On the one hand it showcases the persistent online differences in class and caste, and therefore more generally of inequality. This combines both a caste distinction, which remains absolute as long as people practice caste endogamy, and a class distinction, which is more scalable. But at the same time we see that the areas of concern within social media usage, revealed by kinship in previous chapters and by the triangle of teachers, students and parents in Chapter 6, are common to all.

Taking this as a whole we are still confronted by a key question: does social media matter at all? An answer to this question has to start by confronting a key finding in Chapter 4.

Not all kinds of social media assume importance when it comes to the set of relationships that are most significant to most people at Panchagrami – namely the family with whom they live their lives. Such a realization is a valuable corrective to the natural tendency to ascribe a major role to social media, having chosen it as the subject of research, irrespective of the situation. Perhaps the most eloquent testimony to the limits of social media is that Facebook may be used explicitly to demonstrate the love that exists within families to the wider family, or to those who live outside of the family, but it is never used to express that love *within families*. This might seem to be contradicted by the familial use of WhatsApp, but actually this is because WhatsApp is often viewed as an extension of a scalable messaging service rather than as a social media, as seen in Chapter 2. This also in a way showcases how social media tends to be categorised at Panchagrami. Twitter is considered the most elite and the most public platform; it is followed by Facebook, which allows the friending of strangers, and then by WhatsApp, which, though scalable, is still seen as a private platform, with interest group members being viewed as acquaintances. This directly speaks to both the notions of polymedia[15] and scalable sociality.[16]

Overall even the term 'social media' has a different connotation in this Indian case from many of the other studies. In some countries today social media simply means that which extends out from individual and dyadic communication to encompass the ability to deal with a wider group audience. In India, however, 'social' is synonymous with society, which is tightly organised by traditional principles such as kinship, age, gender, class and caste. In other words society is tightly ordered according to groups; understanding how social media is used there also means

understanding the way any media is socialised into these pre-ordained groups. The theory of scalable sociality suggests that early social media was a scaling down to groups from public broadcasting, while recent social media is a scaling up to groups from dyadic communication. But in this region of south India social media is principally about group communication – simply because social networking here has always been about group communication.

This point is perhaps most powerfully established by the fact that it contradicts the original intentions of this research project, and the premise that was associated with the initial choice of location. This was not merely the juxtaposition of traditional and modern, which is taking place very widely across India. This was bringing in 200,000 IT workers to live among villages and fields within the course of ten years. The scale is extraordinary, the speed is extraordinary and the difference between these two communities is extraordinary. It seemed obvious and inevitable that this juxtaposition would have dominated the book throughout. Yet this was India; and given the openness of the ethnographic method, our perception of the true use and consequences of social media quickly changed.

It became evident that, notwithstanding this juxtaposition of the ultra-modern with highly traditional rural structures, what mattered just as much is what these two groups have in common. All the population of Panchagrami, both long established and recently arrived, remains organised through a distinctly Indian system of order, values and social categories, from caste, class and the extended family to hierarchies of age and gender. Everything here was already intensely socialised. All conspires to make these 'social media' more often a reflection of these wider Indian sensibilities and structures, which remain rather different from those found in other societies.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 Caste is an endogamous system, which ascribes a socially distinct group identity to an individual at birth. For more on the caste system in Tamil Nadu see Pillay, K. P. K. 1977. *The Caste System in Tamil Nadu*. Chennai: University of Madras.
2 http://www.discoveranthropology.org.uk/about-anthropology/fieldwork/ethnography.html
3 A pseudonym for a group of five villages.
4 This figure is an approximation of the floating population that includes IT employees, small-time traders, construction workers etc. It is based on interviews with IT professionals, panchayat officers, college professors and residents of this area.
5 'Hypermasculinity' refers to an exaggerated notion of masculinity and machismo. In this example it also refers to the attitude that women are generally weak and need to be protected from other men. See Parrott, D. J. and Zeichner, A. 2003. 'Effects of hypermasculinity on physical aggression against women.' *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* 4(1): 70 and Spencer, M. B., Fegley, S., Harpalani, V. and Seaton, G. 2004. 'Understanding hypermasculinity in context: A theory-driven analysis of urban adolescent males' coping responses.' *Research in Human Development* 1(4): 229–57.
6 Continuity refers to an unbroken and constant connection over time and space.
7 A popular soap brand in India.
8 A popular deodorant brand in India.
9 Mandelbaum, D. G. 1970. *Society in India: Continuity and Change* (vol.1). Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
10 McPherson, M., Smith-Lovin, L. and Cook, J. M. 2001. 'Birds of a feather: Homophily in social networks.' *Annual Review of Sociology*: 415–44.
11 'Why We Post' – https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post
12 This was also observed in Brazil. Please refer to Spyer, J. Forthcoming. *Social Media in Brazil*. London: UCL Press.
13 This was also one of the key findings of the bigger 'Why We Post' project – https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/discoveries/why-we-post/discoveries/7-we-used-to-just-talk-now-we-talk-photos
14 Chapter 3 introduces those visuals that effectively fall between the public and the private spheres as 'in betweener visuals' in the offline space, then draws parallels to them in social media communications.
15 Cialdini, R. B. and Goldstein, N. J. 2004. 'Social influence: Compliance and conformity.' *Annual Review of Psychology.* 55: 591–621.
16 For more on kinship in India please see Uberoi, P., ed. 1993. *Family, kinship and marriage in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press. For Dravidian and Tamil kinship please see Dumont, L. 1953–4. 'The Dravidian Kinship Terminology as an Expression of Marriage.' *Man* 53: 34–9; Trautmann, T. R. 1981. *Dravidian Kinship*. New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt Limited; Trawick, M. 1990. *Notes on love in a Tamil family*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.; Gough, E. K. 1956. 'Brahman kinship in a Tamil

village.' *American Anthropologist* 58(5): 826–53; Kapadia, K. 1994. '"Kinship burns!": kinship discourses and gender in Tamil South India.' *Social Anthropology* 2(3): 281–97.

17 For more on caste endogamy see: https://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/tutor/marriage/caste_endogamy.html

18 Laughey, D. 2007. *Key themes in media theory*. Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education; Gottdiener, M., Budd, L. and Lehtovuori, P. 2015. *Key concepts in urban studies*. London: Sage Publications.

19 Laughey, D., 2007; Gottdiener, M. et al., 2015.

20 Reddy, P. G. 2010. 'Some Problems Faced By The Software Professionals In India: An Overview' in Lakshmansamy, T., ed. *Population Dynamics and Human Development Opportunities and Challenges*. New Delhi: Bookwell, 451–71; Upadhya, C. and Vasavi, A. R. 2006. *Work, culture, and sociality in the Indian IT industry: a sociological study*. Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore.

21 The role of kinship in urban industries in India is common. For more on kinship in textile industries see De Neve, G. 2008. '"We are all sondukarar (relatives)!": kinship and its morality in an urban industry of Tamilnadu, South India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 42(1): 211–46; Vidyarthi, L. P. 1984, in Vidyarthi, L. P., ed. *Applied anthropology in India: principles, problems and case studies*. New Delhi: Kitab Mahal.

22 Dahlman, C. J. and Utz, A. 2005. *India and the knowledge economy: leveraging strengths and opportunities*. Washington D. C.: World Bank Publications.

23 http://www.firstpost.com/india/celebrating-madras-day-so-many-reasons-to-love-chennai-modern-indias-first-city-1669189.html

24 Kanchipuram or Kanchi, the historic city, is approximately 72 km (45 miles) from Chennai. Panchagrami belongs to the district of Kanchipuram and is approximately 75 km (47 miles) from the city of Kanchipuram.

25 Issues of keeping the canal clean and the general governance of waterways, as well as the growing popularity of other transport systems, are a few of the reasons for the closure.

26 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

27 Nagaswamy, R. and Nakacami, I. 2008. *Mahabalipuram*. New York: Oxford University Press.

28 Dubreuil, G. J. 1917. *The Pallavas*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

29 Muthiah, S. 2011. *Madras Miscellany: A decade of People, Places and Potpourri*. Chennai: Westland; Lakshman, N. 2013. *Degree Coffee by the Yard: A Short Biography of Madras*. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.

30 Pillay, K. P. K. 1977. *The Caste System in Tamil Nadu*. Chennai: University of Madras; Thurston, E. and Rangachari, K. 1909. 'Castes and tribes of South India.' New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

31 Rabe, M. D. 2001. *The great penance at Māmallapuram: deciphering a visual text*. General editor G. John Samuel. Chennai: Institute of Asian Studies; Iyengar, P. S. 1929. *History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 AD*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.

32 One of the gods in the Hindu trinity.

33 One of the gods in the Hindu trinity.

34 Madhavan, C. 2007. *Vishnu Temples of South India: vol.I: Tamil Nadu*. Chennai: Alphaland Books.

35 Pedersen, J. D. 2000. 'Explaining economic liberalization in India: state and society perspectives.' *World Development* 28(2): 265–82.

36 Information Technology and Information Technology Enabled Services.

37 Defined here as those who speak Tamil as their native language.

38 A festival celebrated by the Malayalees; see http://www.onamfestival.org/what-is-onam.html Malayalees are defined here as those who speak Malayalam as their native language and hail from the state of Kerala. The festival of Onam is normally celebrated in the months of August/September.

39 A festival celebrated around the middle of April.

40 A festival celebrated by North Indian Hindu women, http://www.karwachauth.com/. The festival normally falls in the months of October/November.

41 Ambedkar, B. R. 1944. 'Annihilation of caste, with a reply to Mahatma Gandhi.' – http://www.ambedkar.org/ambcd/02.Annihilation%20of%20Caste.htm – Undelivered speech prepared in 1936; the third edition was released in 1944.

42 Veeramani, K. 2005. *Collected works of Periyar EVR*. Chennai: The Periyar Self-Respect Propaganda Institution.
43 Although the term Dalit refers to a group of castes categorised under the official term Scheduled Castes, locally people in Panchagrami use the term Dalit. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dalit and http://socialjustice.nic.in/UserView/index?mid=76750
44 For example Brahmins are categorised as Other Castes, Dalits as Scheduled Castes and Irulas as Scheduled Tribes.
45 Fuller, C. J., ed. 1996. *Caste today*. New York: Oxford University Press; Gough, E. K. 1955. 'The Social Structure of a Tanjore Village', in Marriot, M., ed. *Village India*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Gough, E. K. 1960. 'Caste in a Tanjore Village', in Leach, E., ed. *Aspects of* Caste *in South India, Ceylon and Northwest Pakistan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Beteille, A. 1965. *Caste, class, and power: Changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press; Srinivas, M. N. 1960. *The social structure of a Mysore village*. Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill.
46 Village governing bodies. These government schools are still under the aegis of the village panchayats.
47 Thurston, E. and Rangachari, K. 1909. *Castes and tribes of South India*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services.
48 http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/data_files/india/Final_PPT_2011_chapter6.pdf – As of 2011, the literacy rate of Tamil Nadu was higher than the national literacy rate.
49 Picherit, D. 2012. 'Migrant Labourers' Struggles Between Village and Urban Migration Sites: Labour Standards, Rural Development and Politics in South India.' *Global Labour Journal* 3(1): 143–62.
50 Gough, E. K. 1955; Gough, E. K. 1960; Beteille, A. 1965; Srinivas, M. N. 1960.
51 One pound sterling equates to approximately 100 Indian rupees.
52 http://dmk.in/english
53 http://aiadmk.com/en/home/
54 http://mdmk.org.in/
55 http://www.dmdkparty.com/
56 http://www.thiruma.in/
57 http://www.pmkparty.in/
58 The government of Tamil Nadu has created a quota-based reservation policy, specifically in employment (government jobs) and education (government and private institutions), to support the historically exploited caste groups.
59 Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. 2007. *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. New York: Routledge; Van Maanen, J. 2011. *Tales of the field: On writing ethnography*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
60 Boellstorff, T. 2012. *Ethnography and virtual worlds: A handbook of method*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Pink, S., Horst, H., Postill, J., Hjorth, L., Lewis, T. and Tacchi, J. 2015. *Digital ethnography: principles and practice*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications; Hine, C. 2015. *Ethnography for the internet: embedded, embodied and everyday*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
61 These questionnaires were standard across all of the nine sites. The results of Q2 were compared and published as a chapter in Miller, D., Costa, E., Haynes, N., McDonald, T., Nicolescu, R., Sinanan, J., Spyer, J., Venkatraman, S. and Wang, X. 2016. *How the World Changed Social Media*. London: UCL Press, 286.
62 Miller et al. 2016.

Chapter 2

1 http://www.deccanchronicle.com/141016/nation-current-affairs/article/chennai-fifth-number-facebook-users
2 This swift movement is associated with the development of ICTs in India. Leapfrogging and technology diffusion are extensively discussed in ICT for development literature aimed at developing countries. However, the series of rapid leaps at Panchagrami is due to a combination of market penetration of affordable technologies, a socio-economic shift in the

area due to the emerging IT sector and a bridging of the digital divide. See Friedman, T. L. 2005. *The world is flat: A brief history of the twenty-first century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013. *Cell phone nation: How mobile phones have revolutionized business, politics and ordinary life in India*. New Delhi: Hachette; Soete, L. 1985. 'International diffusion of technology, industrial development and technological leapfrogging.' *World Development* 13(3): 409–22; Pentland, A., Fletcher, R. and Hasson, A. 2004. 'Daknet: Rethinking connectivity in developing nations.' *Computer* 37(1): 78–83; Mani, S. 2007. 'Revolution in India's Telecommunications Industry.' *Economic and Political Weekly*: 578–80; Mani, S. 2012. 'Bridging the digital divide: the Indian experience in increasing the access to telecommunications services.' *International Journal of Technological Learning, Innovation and Development* 5(1–2): 184–203; Rangaswamy, N. and Cutrell, E. 2013. 'Anthropology, Development and ICTs: Slums, Youth and the Mobile Internet in Urban India', Special Issue, *Reflections at the Nexus of Theory and Practice, Information Technology and International Development*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press; Toyama, K., Kiri, K., Maithreyi, L., Nileshwar, A., Vedashree, R. and MacGregor, R. 2004. 'Rural kiosks in India.' *MSR Technical Report*. For discussions on further growth of ICTs please see Steinmueller, W.E. 2001. 'ICTs and the possibilities for leapfrogging by developing countries.' *International Labour Review* 140(2): 193–210; Mathur, A. and Ambani, D. 2005. 'ICT and rural societies: Opportunities for growth.' *The International Information & Library Review* 37(4): 345–51. For the diffusion of ICT in India and its associated development see Vijaybaskar, M. and Gayathri, V. 2003. 'ICT and Indian Development: Processes, Prognoses, Policies.' *Economic and Political Weekly* 38(24): 2360–4; Bajwa, S. B. 2003. 'ICT Policy in India in the era of liberalization: its impact and consequences.' *Global Built Environment Review* 3(2): 49–61; Kumar, P. 2014. 'ICT and Its Development in India.' http://www.irjcjournals.org/ijieasr/Feb2014/2.pdf. For a critique on bridging the digital divide, see Wade, R. H. 2002. 'Bridging the digital divide: new route to development or new form of dependency?' *Global Governance* 8(4): 443–66.

3 Kumar, K. J. 2014. *Mass communication in India*. New Delhi: Jaico Publishing House; Rangaswamy, N. *Pocket Social Networking in India – SMS GupShup Expands*, Asia Pacific Memo, November 2012. http://www.asiapacificmemo.ca/pocket-social-networking-in-india-sms-gupshup-expands

4 Face-to-face communication in natural settings still forms a dominant method of communication in Panchagrami. For a theoretical understanding of the ritual of face-to face interactions, see Goffman, E. 2005. *Interaction ritual: Essays in face to face behavior*. Piscataway, NJ: AldineTransaction.

5 This could in a way be related to McLuhan's idea that medium *is* the message. McLuhan, M. 1964. *Understanding Media. The extensions of man*. London: MIT Press. See also Rogers, E. M. and Bhowmik, D. K. 1970. 'Homophily–heterophily: Relational concepts for communication research.' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34(4): 523–38.

6 Identifying the right messenger to communicate certain information might have been challenging at times. For example, a paper by J. F. Marshall discusses the need for employing more women to talk about family planning programmes in rural India. Though this paper is from 1971, it gives a historical sense of how messengers were needed to communicate certain policy information in Indian villages. Marshall, J. F. 1971. 'Topics and networks in intra-village communication', in Polgar, S. A., ed. *Culture and population: a collection of current studies*. Cambridge, MA: Schenkman, 160–6. For an understanding of communication in Indian villages see Rao, Y. L. 1966. *Communication and development: A study of two Indian villages*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press; Damle, Y. B. 1956. 'Communication of modern ideas and knowledge in Indian villages.' *Public Opinion Quarterly* 20(1): 257–70.

7 Epstein, A. L. 1969. 'Gossip, Norms and Social Network', in Mitchell, J. C., ed. *Social networks in urban situations: analyses of personal relationships in Central African towns*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

8 At Panchagrami this public space was not socially segregated based on caste. This is important as public spaces in India were often associated with caste and untouchability. See Alex, G. 2008. 'A Sense of Belonging and Exclusion: "Touchability" and "Untouchability" in Tamil Nadu.' *Ethnos* 73(4): 523–43; Bros, C. and Couttenier, M. 2010. *Untouchability and public infrastructure*. https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00542235/; Shah, G. 2006. *Untouchability in rural India*. New Delhi: Sage Publications; Sooryamoorthy, R.

2008. ‘Untouchability in modern India.’ *International Sociology* 23(2): 283–93; Alexander, K. C. 1968. ‘Changing Status of Pulaya Harijans of Kerala.’ *Economic and Political Weekly*: 1071–4.

9 The word for telegram in Tamil.

10 http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-23304251

11 For a general history of mass communication in India, see Kumar, K. J. 2014; Vilanilam, J. V. 2005. *Mass communication in India: A Sociological perspective*. New Delhi. Sage Publications.

12 http://www.suryanfm.in/chennai/; http://www.radiomirchi.com/chennai; http://www.927bigfm.com/city.php?id=11

13 http://www.firstpost.com/politics/freebies-culture-in-tamil-nadu-reeks-of-a-guilty-conscious-neta-who-doesnt-really-care-2781472.html; http://www.livemint.com/Opinion/GGMQFv1iFGJiKMzPZWWVLN/Why-Tamil-Nadus-freebie-culture-works.html

14 http://www.sunnetwork.in/, http://jayatvnetwork.com/default.aspx, http://www.in.com/tv/channel/star-vijay-164.html

15 http://www.dailythanthi.com/, http://www.dinamalar.com/

16 http://www.thehindu.com/, http://www.newindianexpress.com/, http://www.deccan-chronicle.com/, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/, http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/

17 https://www.kumudam.com/, http://www.vikatan.com/

18 http://indiatoday.intoday.in/, http://www.businesstoday.in/, http://www.femina.in/, http://www.vogue.in/

19 http://www.dqindia.com/, http://www.digit.in/. These were accessed both online and in print versions. A few IT managers even said that their companies had subsidised subscription fees for tech magazines.

20 Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013; Pitroda, S. 1993. ‘Development, democracy, and the village telephone.’ *Harvard Business Review* 71(6): 66–8.

21 This was on a temporary basis, where the neighbour would visit the home with the phone to make a call or to receive one from a close relative or friend. Long distance calls to other states were placed by booking a trunk call.

22 Kumar, K. J. 2014. STD is an abbreviation of Subscriber Trunk Dialling; ISD stands for International Subscriber Dialling.

23 http://scroll.in/article/744579/what-happened-to-india-when-the-landline-telephone-fell-terminally-ill-20-years-ago

24 The term ‘non-smartphone’ is used interchangeably with ‘feature phone’. For a detailed analysis of the general and quite radical transformation presented by the mobile phone in India as a whole see Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013; Kavoori, A. and Chadha, K. 2006. ‘The cell phone as a cultural technology: Lessons from the Indian case’, in Kavoori, A. and Arceneaux, N., eds. *The cell phone reader: Essays in social transformation*. New York: Peter Lang; Katz, J. E. 2008. *Handbook of mobile communication studies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. For a detailed understanding of mobile use in the developing world see Donner, J. 2008. ‘Research approaches to mobile use in the developing world: A review of the literature.’ *The Information Society* 24(3): 140–59. For a general idea of mobile phone use from an anthropological perspective see Horst, H. and Miller, D. 2006. *The cell phone: An anthropology of communication*. Oxford: Berg.

25 Non-branded ‘assembled’ desktops built by local hardware technicians became popular and their numbers in the area increased.

26 Nisbett, N. 2009. *Growing Up in the Knowledge Society: Living the IT Dream in Bangalore*. New Delhi: Routledge.

27 This was closely associated with the development of the housing sector in the area.

28 Sreekumar, T. T. 15–19 July 2014. ‘New media, space and marginality: A comparative perspective on cyber cafe use in small and medium towns in Asia.’ Paper presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Annual Conference, Hyderabad, India; Rangaswamy, N. and Bombay, L. S. I. 2007. ‘ICT for development and commerce: A case study of internet cafés in India’ (research in progress paper) in *Proceedings of the 9th International Conference on Social Implications of Computers in Developing Countries,* São Paulo, Brazil; Donner, J. September 2006. ‘Internet use (and non-use) among urban microenterprises in the developing world: an update from India’, in *Conference of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR)*: 28–30.

29 There have been several studies on Orkut as one of the earliest and most popular social media platforms in India. See Ahmad, A. 2011. 'Rising of social network websites in India overview.' *International Journal of Computer Science and Network Security* 11(2): 155–8; Pillai, A. 2012. 'User acceptance of social networking websites in India: Orkut vs. Facebook.' *International Journal of Indian Culture and Business Management* 5(4): 405–14; Goyal, S. 2012. 'Social networks on the Web', in Peitz, M. and Waldfogel. J., eds. *The Oxford handbook of the digital economy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 434–59; Mishra, S. 2010. 'Participation of youth in social networking sites in India.' *International Journal of Business Innovation and Research* 4(4): 358–75; Mahajan, P. 2009. 'Use of social networking in a linguistically and culturally rich India.' *The International Information & Library Review* 41(3): 129–36; Das, A. 2010. 'Social interaction process analysis of Bengalis on Orkut', in Tiwai, R., ed. *Handbook of Research on Discourse Behavior and Digital Communication: Language Structures and Social Interaction*. Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 66–84; Das, A. 2012. 'Impression Management on Facebook and Orkut: A Cross Cultural Study of Brazilians and Indians.' Internet Research 13.0 Conference, University of Salford, UK, 18–22 October 2012; Das, A. and Herring, S. C. 2016. 'Greetings and interpersonal closeness: The case of Bengalis on Orkut.' *Language & Communication* 47: 53–65.

30 http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/orkut.com; Peterson, M. 2011. *Orkut Dissected: Social Networking in India & Brazil*. http://www.aimclearblog.com/2011/06/27/orkut-dissected-social-networking-in-india-brazil/

31 NRIs (Non-Resident Indians) are Indian citizens who have lived outside India for a period of 182 days or more in a year. Though this is essentially a tax status, such references to individuals have become more common in Panchagrami, owing to the IT employees' constant migration and travel to foreign countries to service their clients. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Non-resident_Indian_and_person_of_Indian_origin. NRI as a reference term is also commonly used in Indian urban centres as well.

32 Orkut, having been acquired by Google, was dissolved in 2014. http://orkut.com/

33 Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013; Smyth, T. N., Kumar, S., Medhi, I. and Toyama, K. April 2010. 'Where there's a will, there's a way: mobile media sharing in urban India', in *Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on Human Factors in computing systems.* Atlanta, GA: ACM, 753–62; Kumar, K. J. and Thomas, A. O. 2006. 'Telecommunications and Development: The Cellular Mobile "Revolution" in India and China.' *Journal of Creative Communications* 1(3): 297–309. For a view of the smartphone industry see Woyke, E. 2014. 'The Smartphone: Anatomy of an industry.' New York: The New Press.

34 Rangaswamy, N. and Yamsani, S. 2011. '"Mental Kartha Hai" or "It's Blowing my Mind": Evolution of the Mobile Internet in an Indian Slum.' EPIC, The Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference, Boulder, CO, 18–21 September; Kumar, N. and Rangaswamy, N. 2013. 'The Mobile Media Actor-Network in Urban India.' ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI 2013), Paris, France, April 2013; Donner, J. 2015. *After access: Inclusion, development, and a more mobile Internet*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

35 Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013.

36 This encompasses all kinds of smartphones, from iPhones to cheap smartphones.

37 http://www.statista.com/statistics/257048/smartphone-user-penetration-in-india/

38 This includes the long-term residents (mostly from the villages), the middle-class IT workers and others who have now settled in this area.

39 They were not residents of this area and were travelling from other places, mostly from Chennai.

40 A reference to a successful phone retailer in Tamil Nadu can be found in Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013.

41 1 pound sterling is approximately valued at INR 100 (100 Indian rupees).

42 Fuller, C. 2011. 'Timepass and boredom in modern India.' *Anthropology of this Century* 1 – a review of Jeffrey, C. 2011. 'Timepass: Youth, Class and The Politics of Waiting in India.'

43 Specifically seen only in the case of upper middle-class families.

44 The chapter discusses this further in the section on Facebook. This is also discussed in Chapter 6 on Education.

45 http://www.dqchannels.com/laptops-freebies/

46 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tethering

47 For more on pirate modernity in India see Sundaram, R. 2009. *Pirate modernity: Delhi's media urbanism*. New York. Routledge.

48 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/tech/how-to/Assemble-a-PC-within-Rs-30000-budget/articleshow/19797394.cms; http://www.icmrindia.org/free%20resources/Articles/Indian%20PC%20Market2.htm

49 http://www.firstpost.com/politics/phones-wi-fi-electricity-aiadmks-manifesto-for-tamil-nadu-polls-is-full-of-freebies-2767768.html; http://aiadmk.com/en/tn-election-2016/tamilnadu-election-manifesto-2016/; http://aiadmk.com/en/tn-election-2016/manifesto-infographics/#

50 A version of this was presented at Venkatraman, S., Rangaswamy N. and Arora, P. 2014. 'Polymedia: A perspective through filial relationships at Panchagrami.' Paper for Panel, *Reconstituting Marginality and Publics in the Digital Age*, Annual International Conference of Media and Communication Research, 15– 19 July 2014. Hyderabad.

51 Short messaging service, also known as texting.

52 The use of missed calls to convey messages is seen in several other contexts as well and is not unique to India. See Donner, J. 2007. 'The rules of beeping: exchanging messages via intentional "missed calls" on mobile phones.' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(1): 1– 22; Donner, J. 2005. 'What can be said with a missed call? Beeping via mobile phones in sub-Saharan Africa.' *Proc. Seeing, Understanding, Learning in the Mobile Age, Institute for Philosophical Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and T-Mobile Hungary Co Ltd, Budapest*: 267– 76.

53 http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/nirbhaya-case-anger-and-protests-as-juvenile-delhi-gang-rapist-freed-after-three-years-in-reform-a6780601.html; http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-35115974

54 Baym, N. K. 2015. *Personal connections in the digital age*. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons; Papacharissi, Z., ed. 2010. *A networked self: Identity, community, and culture on social network sites*. New York: Routledge.

55 The intent of this survey was to establish the popularity of certain social media platforms among a sample of social media users. This is important as it offers a method of judging the relative popularity of one social media platform over another. The results of this survey thus only suggest the use and popularity of social media platforms *within this sample of users* and is not intended for extrapolation to the general public. This survey was conducted by stratifying the population into long-term residents (n=62) and newer residents living in the multi-storeyed apartment complexes (n=68). The samples were recruited using a snowball technique. While most long-term residents involved in this survey fell into the lower socio-economic class and middle classes, the newer residents (who were mostly in the IT sector) fell into the middle and upper middle classes. The sample of long-term residents mostly involved men ranging from 14 to 38 years; the sample of newer residents involved both men and women aged between 15 and 70 years.

56 Though as platforms they may be different, as a business entity they are the same, as Facebook owns WhatsApp: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-26266689. Facebook also owns Instagram: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-17658264

57 Intermittent uses of Instagram were reported among middle-class teenagers and college students.

58 This number more or less coincides with the mobile users of Facebook (socialbakers.com) on 30 April 2015.

59 This was not just seen at Panchagrami, but was visible in North Indian villages too. See http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/girls-and-unmarried-women-in-india-forbidden-from-using-mobile-phones-to-prevent-disturbance-in-a6888911.html; http://mashable.com/2016/02/22/india-villages-ban-mobile-phones/#iCfdPBCP.ZqJ

60 Marriage and sexual contact between higher and lower ranking castes are seen as pollution according to the Hindu caste system. For introductory reading on the concepts of pollution and purity, and how these relate to different castes, see http://rohitshrawagi.blogspot.co.uk/. For an anthropological exploration and critique of this concept see Fuller, C. J. 1979. 'Gods, priests and purity: on the relation between Hinduism and the caste system.' *Man*: 459–76; Marglin, F. A. 1977. 'Power, purity and pollution: Aspects of the caste system reconsidered.' *Contribution to Indian Sociology Delhi* 11(2): 245–70; Gough, E. K. 1955. 'The social structure of a Tanjore village.' in McKim, M. ed. *Village India*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press; Gough, K. 1973. 'Harijans in Thanjavur.' *Imperialism and revolution in South Asia*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 222–45.

61 Though this cannot be strictly termed as 'sharing' one mobile device, as it only relates to borrowing for a specific time. However, the sharing of mobile devices does take place in India;

see Steenson, M. and Donner, J. 2009. 'Beyond the personal and private: Modes of mobile phone sharing in urban India', in Ling, R. and Campbell, S. eds. *The reconstruction of space and time: Mobile communication practices*, New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 231–50.

62 The use of mobile phones by women in rural areas, as well as in the lower middle class and the lower socio-economic classes, is varied. While some communities allow their use freely or allow for some restricted use, a few others ban them completely. See Doron, A. 2012. 'Mobile persons: Cell phones, gender and the self in North India.' *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 13(5): 414–33; Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013; Mehta, B. S. 2013. 'Capabilities, costs, networks and innovations: impact of mobile phones in rural India.' *Available at SSRN 2259650*; Jouhki, J. 2013. 'A Phone of One's Own? Social Value, Cultural Meaning and Gendered Use of the Mobile Phone in South India.' *Journal of the Finnish Anthropological Society* 38(1): 37–58; Gurumurthy, A. and Menon, N. 2009. 'Violence against women via cyberspace.' *Economic and Political Weekly*: 19–21; Tenhunen, S. 2014. 'Mobile telephony, mediation, and gender in rural India.' *Contemporary South Asia* 22(2): 157–70.

The associations of a mobile phone with romance and sexual liaisons were not unique to India but were also found in the context of Jamaica; see Miller, D. and Slater, D. 2005. 'Comparative Ethnography of New Media', in Curran, J. P. and Gurevitch, M., eds. *Mass Media and Society*, 4th edition. London: Hodder Arnold.

63 Laughey, D. 2007; Gottdiener, M. 2015.

64 All of them declined to friend me for fear of being exposed to other men through my research Facebook profile.

65 Families of people working in the IT sector, entrepreneurs or those in other skilled jobs.

66 Rangaswamy, N. and Arora, P. 2015. 'Digital Romance in the Indian City', in *The City and South Asia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard South Asia Institute.

67 Sharing media was also visible, even with limited technical capabilities in mobile phones. Please refer to Smyth, T. N. et al. 2010.

68 Case studies of which will form part of the discussion on families in Chapter 4.

69 Several normative discourses on relationship were prevalent in this group which constituted the elderly.

70 http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/global-social-media/2013/12/15/non-resident-indians/

71 It was very difficult to gauge the extent of multiple/fake profiles on Facebook at Panchagrami, since not everyone was forthcoming with this information. For authentic multiple profiles that a person might create to establish his or her identity in two different social networks see http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/global-social-media/2014/04/11/who-am-i-the-case-of-caste-related-profiles-on-facebook/

72 The project still saw WhatsApp as a social media platform.

73 As discussed in the Q1 survey.

74 This is closely associated with the idea of scalable sociality as discussed in Chapter 1. See Miller, D. et al. 2016.

75 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013. 'Polymedia: Towards a new theory of digital media in interpersonal communication.' *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 16(2): 169–87.

76 However, they still used other social media platforms such as Twitter or LinkedIn, or used other media to communicate. Exclusive use of only one platform was very rare. The case for polymedia was very strong at Panchagrami. Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013.

77 In a way this refers to the idea of 'scalable sociality' described in Miller, D. et al. 2016.

78 http://www.dnaindia.com/scitech/report-whatsapp-user-base-crosses-70-million-in-india-2031465

79 These groups varied in size and form. They might be, for example, personal, professional, spiritual, hobby groups etc.

80 Miller, D. et al. 2016.

81 More on this is dealt with in Chapter 4, which discusses the impact of WhatsApp in family circles.

82 Lakshmi does not do this with her mother-in-law, who is already criticising her for being a working mother and leaving her children without maternal care.

83 See Appadurai, A. 1988. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

84 'Perceived' because somehow many failed to appreciate that it was equally true that their smartphone provided such mobility, not just WhatsApp alone.

85 However, as stated earlier, they were comparatively much more active than men of their age on Facebook.
86 For more on romance through WhatsApp from a female perspective, please refer to Costa, E. 2016. *Social Media in Southeast Turkey*. London: UCL Press, 206.
87 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kitty_party
88 http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/global-social-media/2015/04/17/women-entrepreneurs-whatsapp/
89 This is generally believed to be a curse caused by a malevolent gaze (emerging from deep emotions of envy or hate) and causes problems to the person on whom it was bestowed. Often the subject of an 'evil eye' is unaware, hence the need to take precautions such as limiting public contact. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evil_eye
90 http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/global-social-media/2014/07/25/its-ok-to-send-my-boss-a-whatsapp-message/
91 It did not really seem to matter that prior to January 2016 WhatsApp users at Panchagrami were actually charged.
92 http://thehackernews.com/2016/01/whatsapp-free-lifetime.html
93 This was also the case in southeast Turkey. See Costa, E. 2016.
94 Kollywood is the portmanteau of the words 'Kodambakkam' – the location of the Tamil film industry in Chennai – and 'Hollywood'. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_cinema
95 Chapter 3 discusses the role of cinema on social media in more detail.
96 They were found to be inactive during the period of field work. The period of inactivity ranges from a couple of months to several years.
97 It was ironic that these families described themselves as being less conservative, even while imposing restrictions such as surveillance on the social media usage of young women in the family. However, such families would argue that they are less conservative in comparison with those who totally banned access to social media or smartphones.
98 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
99 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013.
100 Miller, D. et al. 2016.

Chapter 3

1 This change coincided with Vadivelu's purchase of an affordable Samsung smartphone with a good front-facing camera.
2 Nakassis, C.V. 2014. 'Suspended Kinship and Youth Sociality in Tamil Nadu, India.' *Current Anthropology* 55(2): 175–99; Nisbett, N. 2007. 'Friendship, consumption, morality: practising identity, negotiating hierarchy in middle-class Bangalore.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(4): 935–50.
3 Conforming to their social network's ideals, and in this case performing to the expected ideals of their social network, were seen as being important to these young men. This could be the result of network homophily. See McPherson, M. 2001. For an introduction to social network analysis, its research and applications see Marin, A. and Wellman, B. 2011. 'Social network analysis: An introduction', in Carrington, P., and Scott, J., eds. *The SAGE handbook of social network analysis*. London. Sage Publications, 11–25; Mitchell, J. C., ed. 1969. *Social networks in urban situations: analyses of personal relationships in Central African towns*. Manchester: Manchester University Press; Wasserman, S. and Galaskiewicz, J. eds. 1994. *Advances in social network analysis: Research in the social and behavioral sciences*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 171; Christakis, N. A. 2010. *Connected: The amazing power of social networks and how they shape our lives*. London: HarperCollins; Watts, D. 2003. *Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age*. New York: W. W. Norton & Co.; Scott, J. 2012. *Social network analysis*. London: Sage Publications. For more on compliance in social networks see Brass, D. J. 1992. 'Power in organizations: A social network perspective.' *Research in Politics and Society* 4(1): 295–323.
4 Nakassis, C.V. 2013. 'Youth masculinity, "style" and the peer group in Tamil Nadu, India.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47(2): 245–69; Nakassis, C. V. 2010. 'Youth and Status in Tamil Nadu, India.' Publicly Accessible Penn Dissertations. 227. http://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/227. UPenn Repository. For a comparative view of friendship in Kerala

see Osella, C. and Osella, F. 1998. 'Friendship and flirting: micro-politics in Kerala, South India.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(2): 189–206.

5 Christakis, N.A. 2010.

6 Pushpa, S. 1996. 'Women and philanthropy in India.' *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 7(4): 412–27.

7 This aspect of middle-class altruism has been debated in works such as Varma, P. K. 2007. *The great Indian middle class*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, India, and Mathur, N. 2010. 'Shopping malls, credit cards and global brands: consumer culture and lifestyle of India's new middle class.' *South Asia Research* 30(3): 211–31. Irrespective of whether participants engage in charitable works to avoid feelings of guilt or whether it is true altruism, this remains a powerful part of their ideology, at least at Panchagrami. Middle-class women in Panchagrami still tend to participate in such philanthropic activities.

8 The greater storage space of smartphones and the practice of sharing images online through WhatsApp has given such photographs a longer life, enabling people to re-live memories over a longer period of time. See Van Dijck, J. 2008. 'Digital photography: communication, identity, memory.' *Visual Communication* 7(1): 57–76.

9 See Chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion of fictive kinship.

10 The role of memes as a 'moral police' of online life was also witnessed in several other field sites in this project. This is also one of Why We Post's major discoveries in the use of social media. See https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/discoveries/14-memes-have-become-the-moral-police-of-online-life

11 Trawick, M. 1990. *Notes on love in a Tamil family*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

12 This could also be seen as seeking support and feedback from one's social network. Please refer to Gottlieb, B.H. 1981. *Social networks and social support*, vol. 4. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

13 Fan clubs for film stars, particularly the heroes of Tamil films, are popular. A few Tamil stars have used such fan clubs for political mileage. See Dickey, S. 1993. 'The politics of adulation: Cinema and the production of politicians in South India.' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52(2): 340–72; Dickey, S. 1993. *Cinema and the Urban Poor in South Asia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Rogers, M. 2009. 'Between fantasy and "reality": Tamil film star fan club networks and the political economy of film fandom.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 32(1): 63–85; Rajanayagam, S. 2015. *Popular Cinema and Politics in South India: The Films of MGR and Rajinikanth*. New Delhi: Routledge; Pandian, M. S. S. 2015. *The image trap: MG Ramachandran in film and politics*. New Delhi: Sage Publications India; Srinivas, S.V. 1996. 'Devotion and defiance in fan activity.' *Journal of Arts and Ideas* 29(1): 67–83.

14 https://www.ucl.ac.uk/why-we-post/discoveries/why-we-post/discoveries/7-we-used-to-just-talk-now-we-talk-photos; Miller, D. 2015. 'Photography in the Age of Snapchat.' Anthropology and Photography Pamphlet Series. London: Royal Anthropological Institute [Photographic Committee] Web https://www.therai.org.uk/images/stories/photography/AnthandPhotoVol1B.pdf; Miller, D. and Sinanan, J. 2017. *Visualising Facebook*. London: UCL Press.

15 Pinney, C. 2008. *The coming of photography in India*. London: The British Library; Dwyer, R. 2006. *Filming the gods: Religion and Indian cinema*. Oxford and New York: Routledge; Pinney, C. 2004. *'Photos of the Gods': The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. London: Reaktion Books; Jain, K. 2007. *Gods in the bazaar: The economies of Indian calendar art*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

16 Mazzarella, W. 2003. *Shoveling smoke: Advertising and globalization in contemporary India*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press.

17 Khanduri, R. G. 2014. *Caricaturing Culture in India: Cartoons and History in the Modern World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. The Amul advertisements that are famous in India are examples of caricatures and cartoons on public billboards. See Murray, L. C. 2014. *Advertising Amul: On Meaning, Materiality, and Dairy in India*. Web. http://static1.squarespace.com/static/534587eae4b0fb5fdfb963aa/t/54a9f38ce4b08424e6a8c019/1420424106572/Milk+In+India+Part+II.pdf

18 Velayutham, S. ed. 2008. *Tamil cinema: the cultural politics of India's other film industry*, vol. 10. Oxford and New York: Routledge. Pandian, A. 2015. *Reel world: an anthropology of creation*.

Durham, NC: Duke University Press; Dickey, S. and Jacob, P. 2008. *Celluloid Deities: The Visual Culture of Cinema and Politics in South India*. Lanham: MD: Lexington Books.

19 Pinney, C. 2004.

20 Ibid.

21 Zeff, A. 1999. *Marriage, film, and video in Tamilnadu: Narrative, image, and ideologies of love*. A dissertation submitted to University of Pennsylvania. Web: http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI9926222/?pagewanted=all

22 Tamil months generally tend to start on the 15th/16th of English calendar months. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_calendar for more information on Tamil months.

23 The name of the Amman differs based on the region, for example Palandiamman, Angalamman etc. See Beck, B. E. 1981. 'The Goddess and the Demon. A local South Indian festival and its wider context', in Biardeau, M. ed. *Autour de la déesse hindoue*. Paris: Purusartha; Sciences Sociales en Asie du Sud, 83–136. Good, A. 1985. 'The annual goddess festival in a South Indian village.' *South Asian Social Scientist* 1(2): 119–67. Hiltebeitel, A. 1991. *The Cult of Draupadi: On Hindu Ritual and the Goddess*, vol.2. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. Fuller, C. J. and Logan, P. 1985. 'The Navarātri Festival in Madurai.' *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 48(1): 79–105.

24 Fuller, C. J. 2001. 'The "Vinayaka Chaturthi" Festival and Hindutva in Tamil Nadu.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 1607–16.

25 To understand the role of communities and that of caste in temple festivals see Neve, G. D. 2000. 'Patronage and "community": the role of a Tamil "village" festival in the integration of a town.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6(3): 501–19. Mosse, D. 1997. 'Honour, caste and conflict: The ethnohistory of a Catholic festival in rural Tamil Nadu (1730–1990).' *Purusārtha* 19: 71–120.

26 Hardgrave, R. L. 1975. *When stars displace the gods: The folk culture of cinema in Tamil Nadu*. Austin, Texas: Center for Asian Studies, University of Texas; Dickey, S. and Jacob, P. 2008; Velayutham, S. ed. 2008; Pandian, A. 2016.

27 Just as the term 'Bollywood' refers to Hindi cinema, so 'Kollywood' refers to Tamil cinema.

28 To get a good understanding of cinema in Tamil Nadu see Hardgrave, R. L. and Neidhart, A. C. 1975. 'Films and political consciousness in Tamil Nadu.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 27–35; Hardgrave, R. L. 1973. 'Politics and the Film in Tamilnadu: The Stars and the DMK.' *Asian Survey* 13(3): 288–305; Dickey, S. 1993. 'The politics of adulation: Cinema and the production of politicians in South India.' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 52(2): 340–72; Pandian, M. S. S. 1992. *M G Ramachandran in Film and Politics: The Image Trap*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.

29 The Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, J. Jayalalitha of the AIADMK party, was previously a famous film star, while M. Karunanidhi, the leader of the opposition party (the DMK), was formerly a famous script and dialogue writer for films. Please refer to Jacob, P. 1997. 'From co-star to deity: Popular representations of Ms. Jayalalitha Jayaram.' *Women: A Cultural Review* 8(3): 327–37. For the success of Mr Karunanidhi and his party see Hardgrave, R. L. 1973.

30 Pinney, C. 2004.

31 New films are generally released on Fridays to ensure weekend audiences at the box office.

32 Bate, B. 2013. *Tamil Oratory and the Dravidian Aesthetic: Democratic Practice in South India*. New York: Columbia University Press.

33 Temple iconography and architecture at Panchagrami are of a different category, and have lasted for decades.

34 Pinney, C. 2008.

35 As stated in Chapter 1, at the time of this field work only a handful Muslim families lived at Panchagrami, either on the rural side of Panchagrami or in the multi-storeyed apartment complexes. Access to them was limited. The same applied to Sikh families in the area.

36 Remembering one's ancestors is seen by Hindus as a praiseworthy ideal; both a cultural and religious process, it is embedded in Hindu homes. Several Christians in Panchagrami also had pictures of late parents or grandparents on their living room walls, for whom they prayed on the anniversaries of their deaths. Generally such photographs covered only two generations (parents and grandparents).

37 Of course some people, especially those of the upper middle class, sometimes changed the framed photographs on their coffee tables or cabinets to coincide with an event or a celebration.

38 Some women tend to post old pictures of their family/extended family to showcase family bonding and to revive memories.

39 Carrying out the same exercise on WhatsApp was not possible, since most visual content on this platform could not be divided as it could be for Facebook.
40 One can argue that cinema is the most popular form of entertainment in Tamil Nadu. See Dickey, S. 1993, Velayudham, S. 2008 and Pandian, A. 2015.
41 Pandian, M. S. S. 1992; Dickey, S. 2008. 'The nurturing hero: changing images of MGR', in Velayudham, S. ed. *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*, vol.10. Oxford and New York: Routledge. 77–94. Note: The pictures of MGR presented in this chapter have been taken from different Facebook groups on MGR.
42 Rajanayagam, S. 2015. Note: Rajinikanth, the current superstar of Tamil cinema, though not yet active in politics, continues with a similar style of image display.
43 Offline here refers to the public posting on the actor's images on banners, cut-outs etc, as discussed earlier in the chapter.
44 Actresses, specifically those playing the heroines of Tamil cinema, often have only a very few years to showcase their skills as leading ladies. Heroes tend to dominate Tamil cinema; their leading ladies change frequently and are most often selected from outside Tamil Nadu. Their physical appearance and the current industrial trend – much more than fashion – along with industrial business acumen and fashion have clearly influenced the choice of heroines since the days of MGR. See Chinniah, S. 2008. 'The Tamil film heroine: from a passive subject to a pleasurable object', in Velayudham, S. ed. *Tamil Cinema: The Cultural Politics of India's Other Film Industry*, vol. 10. Oxford and New York: Routledge. 77–94; Lakshmi, C. S. 2008. 'A good woman, a very good woman: Tamil cinema's women' in Velayudham, S. ed. 2008; Nakassis, C.V. 2015. 'A Tamil-speaking Heroine.' *BioScope: South Asian Screen Studies* 6(2): 165–86.
45 Political parties who are major players at state level include AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam), PMK (Pattali Makkal Katchi), DMDK (Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam), VCK (Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi) and MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam). TMC (Tamil Manila Congress – a regional branch of the national Congress party) and BJP (the Tamil Nadu branches of the Bharatiya Janata Party) are also found here. See Chapter 1 for more details on the political parties in this area.
46 Politics in this area is dominated by networks of men, with women called upon only for support during election times.
47 The images of AIADMK's unmarried leader, Ms J. Jayalalitha, are an exception to this.
48 DMK (Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam): A massive Tamil party in Tamil Nadu.
49 https://twitter.com/stalin_offl. For further discussion on the effective conversion of social networks to leadership see Balkundi, P. and Kilduff, M. 2006. 'The ties that lead: A social network approach to leadership.' *The Leadership Quarterly* 17(4), 419–39; on using social capital see Burt, R. S. 2000. 'The network structure of social capital.' *Research in organizational behavior* 22: 345–423; Lin, N., Cook, K. S. and Burt, R. S. eds. 2001. *Social capital: Theory and research*. Piscataway: NJ: Transaction Publishers.
50 AIADMK (All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) is another massive Tamil party in Tamil Nadu and the region's current ruling party. DMK and AIADMK have been alternating as the power centres in Tamil Nadu for over 40 years. Perumal, C. A. and Padmanabhan, V. K. 1987. 'Political Alliances in Tamil Nadu.' *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 48(4): 618–24; Suresh, V. 1992. 'The DMK debacle: Causes and portents.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2313–21; Thirunavukkarasu, R. 2001. 'Election 2001: Changing Equations.' *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2486–9.
51 For more interesting information on the use of murals and cut-outs of politicians, see the work of Dr Roos Gerritsen at http://www.materialworldblog.com/2010/04/the-unanticipated-city-shifting-urban-landscapes-and-the-politics-of-spectacle-in-chennai/
52 The culture of caricature has a long history in India. See Khanduri, R. G. 2014.
53 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtAmdUOfuFQ&index=14&list=PLVwGSavjGgEx-tI65BTxuE4CuclQqjA7fU
54 This is in reference to trolling well-known political leaders within their own Facebook profiles, which have a known social network. However, on public Facebook pages such posts can move on to becoming abusive, as seen in the case of political issues and party ideologies involving national-level politics pertaining to Hindutva and BJP. See an Udupa, S. 2015 E-seminar on Mediaanth Listserv at http://www.media-anthropology.net/file/udupa_abusive_exchange_final2.pdf. Further, though caste-related trolling does also occur, most examples are seen on public pages rather than on individual profiles.

55 Khanduri, R. G. 2014.
56 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
57 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ganesha. The Hindu deity Lord Ganesha is a symbolic representation of victory in Hindu theology. Greeting people with an image of Lord Ganesha here signifies a wish for a good day with no obstacles.
58 'Vanakkam' is a Tamil greeting similar to 'hello' in English. It is used to recognise the other person and to express respect for them. http://test-ie.cfsites.org/custom.php?pageid=363
59 Bourdieu, P. 1980. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
60 Sivananda, S. 2004. *Practice of Karma Yoga*. Rishikesh: Divine Life Society.
61 Similar to Appadurai, A. 1988. *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
62 A tamarind gravy, normally eaten with steamed rice.
63 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
64 Though Panchagrami has a diverse population the networks within each population group are tightly meshed, as seen in Chapter 2.
65 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
66 Noelle-Neumann, E. 1974. 'The spiral of silence: a theory of public opinion.' *Journal of Communication* 24(2): 43–51.

Chapter 4

1 De Neve, G. 2008. '"We are all sondukarar (relatives)!": kinship and its morality in an urban industry of Tamilnadu, South India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 42(1): pp.211–46; Nakassis, C.V. 2014. 'Suspended Kinship and Youth Sociality in Tamil Nadu, India.' *Current Anthropology* 55(2): 175–99; Freed, S. A. 1963. 'Fictive kinship in a north Indian village.' *Ethnology* 2(1): 86–103.
2 Although sister in Tamil could mean either *akka* (elder sister) or *thangachi* (younger sister), Govindan's use of this term was generic.
3 It was very common for people to refer to female cousins as 'cousin sisters' in Panchagrami. For a general idea about kinship in Tamil Nadu see Dumont, L. 1953–4. 'The Dravidian Kinship Terminology as an Expression of Marriage.' *Man* 53: 34–9; Trautmann, T. 1982. *Dravidian Kinship*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
4 These Facebook friends came from different socio-economic classes.
5 Chithiraputhiran, H. 1999. 'Semantic study of Tamil kinship terms.' *Journal of Tamil Studies*, 55–6; Trawick, M. 1990. *Notes on love in a Tamil family*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
6 For example, even strangers are on occasion addressed as '*anna*' or '*akka*' – fictive kinship terms for elder brother or elder sister. This is sometimes thought to provide the bonding required to talk to strangers.
7 There are several works on caste and kinship in India. For a general understanding see Parry, J. P. 2013. *Caste and Kinship in Kangra*. Oxford: Routledge; Mayor, A. C. 1960. *Caste and Kinship in Central India: A Village and its Region*. Oxford: Routledge ; Uyl, M. D. 1995. *Invisible barriers: gender, caste and kinship in a southern Indian village*. Utrecht: International Books. For examples of Tamil-specific notions of caste and kinship see Gough, E. K. 1956. 'Brahman kinship in a Tamil village.' *American Anthropologist* 58(5): 826–53; Rudner, D. W. 1994. *Caste and capitalism in colonial India: the Nattukottai Chettiars*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
8 For gender and kinship in Tamil Nadu see Kapadia, K. 1994. '"Kinship burns!": kinship discourses and gender in Tamil South India.' *Social Anthropology* 2(3): 281–97; Dube, L. 1997. 'Women and kinship: Comparative perspectives on gender in South and South-East Asia.' Tokyo: UNU Press; Dube, L. 1988. 'On the construction of gender: Hindu girls in patrilineal India.' *Economic and Political Weekly*, WS11–WS19.
9 Kolenda, P. 1967. 'Regional differences in Indian family structure', in Crane, R. I. ed. *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study.* Durham, NC: Duke University Monographs and Occasional Papers Series (5).
10 Kolenda, P. M. 1968. 'Region, Caste and Family Structure: a Comparative Study of the Indian "Joint" Family.' Singer, M. and Cohn, B. S. eds. *Structure and change in Indian society*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Press. 339–96.

11 Shah, A. M. 1998. *The family in India: critical essays*. New Delhi: Orient Longman; Shah, A.M. 1973. *The household dimension of the family in India*. New Delhi: Orient Longman; Karve, I. 1965. *Kinship organization in India*. Bombay: Asia Publishing House. 569–70.
12 Säävälä, M. 2014. The "Hindu Joint Family": past and present.' *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 84: 61–74.
13 Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. 2007. 'Information technology professionals and the new-rich middle class in Chennai (Madras).' *Modern Asian Studies* 41(1): 121–50; Gough, K. 1955. 'The social structure of a Tanjore village', in Marriot, M. ed. *Village India*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
14 For a deeper understanding of family systems in India see Uberoi, P. ed. 1993. *Family, kinship and marriage in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press; Uberoi, P. 2005. 'The Family in India.' *Writing the women's movement: a reader.* New Delhi: Zubaan. 361–96.
15 Based on the size of an apartment complex, it can consist of several blocks. Each block consists of several individual apartments, usually running from 4 to close to 100.
16 There were cases when the younger generation sometimes would opt to dine in a restaurant and might prefer going out alone, rather than inviting their parents or in-laws to accompany them.
17 For a general idea (and more details) of urban families in India and the change in family structure see Abbi, B. L. 1969. 'Urban Family in India: A Review Article.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 3(1): 116–27.
18 Stern, H. 1977. 'Power in traditional India: territory, caste and kinship in Rajasthan', in Fox, R. G. ed. *Realm and region in traditional India*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House. 52–78; Ishii, H. 1995. 'Caste and kinship in a Newar village', in Gellner, D. N. and Quigley, D. eds. *Contested Hierarchies: A collaborative ethnography of caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 109–57; Ramu, G. N. 1977. *Family and caste in urban India: a case study*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.
19 For more on fictive kinship in Indian villages see Freed, S. A. 1963; Vatuk, S. 1969. 'Reference, address and fictive kinship in urban north India.' *Ethnology* 8(3): 255–72.
20 Most subcastes identify themselves as castes. However, in this context a caste group is seen as a bigger group of people belonging to several subcastes. See Chapter 1 for further details.
21 Gender and age are important factors that influence communication, as are class and caste, in a patriarchal family which has hierarchical structures.
22 For a greater understanding of the role of mobile phones in India see Doron, A. and Jeffrey, R. 2013. *The great Indian phone book*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
23 In a few cases the mother might work as a construction worker (a construction worker, as seen in the earlier chapters, is a very poor day-wage earner who does manual labour – they belong to the lower socio-economic classes) or housemaid, or in a local factory or shops.
24 Trends of unmarried young women not being given access to mobile phones also exist in north Indian villages, as can be seen from this article: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/girls-and-unmarried-women-in-india-forbidden-from-using-mobile-phones-to-prevent-disturbance-in-a6888911.html
25 A caste in India; see Chapter 1 for more details. See also Heesterman, J. C. 1964. *Brahmin, ritual and renouncer*. Vienna: Universität Wien. Indologisch Institut für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens 8: 1–31; Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. 2010. 'Traditional vocations and modern professions among Tamil Brahmans in colonial and post-colonial south India.' *Indian Economic & Social History Review* 47(4): 473–96; Pandian, M. S. S. 2007. *Brahmin and non-Brahmin: Genealogies of the Tamil political present*. New Delhi: Permanent Black.
26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thanjavur_painting
27 http://www.airtel.com/
28 'Voice Over Internet Protocol'
29 On rare occasions he may send an email to confirm their availability instead.
30 Rainie, L. and Wellman, B. 2012. *Networked: The new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press ; Haythornthwaite, C. 2002. 'Strong, weak, and latent ties and the impact of new media.' *The Information Society* 18(5): 385–401.
31 Xiang, B. 2007. *Global 'body shopping': an Indian labor system in the information technology industry*. Princeton: NJ: Princeton University Press.

32 In other cases, however, the property is rented out to other professionals or students. Advertisements for such rentals appear in the intracompany forums.
33 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013. *Migration and new media: Transnational families and polymedia*. Oxford: Routledge; Haythornthwaite, C. 2002.
34 Miller, D. and Sinanan, J. 2014. *Webcam*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
35 In India the 'evil eye' is the belief that people's presumed envy at seeing one's happiness/ wellbeing/prosperity can bring about misfortunes in the family.
36 Here the term 'public' refers to the social circles that one gathers as friends on Facebook.
37 IT Enabled Services (IT support services).
38 Aarthi's mother visits her without the knowledge of Aarthi's father, who has still not accepted his daughter's marriage.
39 At the time of the field work.
40 This can be related to the ideas of cultural performance and social performance as seen in Turner, V.W. 1982. *From ritual to theatre: The human seriousness of play*. New York: PAJ Publications; Turner, V. W. and Schechner, R. 1988. *The anthropology of performance*. New York: PAJ Publications; Goffman, E. 1978. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
41 The Tamil film industry.
42 The Hindi film industry.
43 Their public display on Facebook for others to see is in a way a display for the couple to see as well. Such posting is related to the acts of public display seen in the cock fights in Bali, viewed as a process of telling a story about themselves to themselves. In so doing it leads to the creation of an identity, in this case that of an idealistic, intimate couple. See Clifford, G. 1973. *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
44 The notion of the ideal Tamil woman is also expressed and reiterated in popular Tamil cinema culture. In a way such notions also help to define a Tamil masculinity. See Pandian, M. S. S. 2015. *The image trap: MG Ramachandran in film and politics*. New Delhi: Sage Publications.
45 Bott, E. and Spillius, E. B. 2014. *Family and social network: Roles, norms and external relationships in ordinary urban families*. Oxford: Routledge.
46 www.geni.com
47 This can be treated as a way of establishing a group identity by co-operating in a group performance. The audience here is socially constituted and contributes to the performance. For more on this see Desmond, J. 1999. *Staging tourism: Bodies on display from Waikiki to Sea World*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
48 This facility was arranged by the professional photographers.
49 Freed, S. A. 1963; Vatuk, S. 1969.
50 Bell, S. and Coleman, S. eds. 1999. *The Anthropology of Friendship*. Oxford: Berg; Killick, E. and Desai, A. 2010. 'Introduction: Valuing Friendship', in Desai, A. and Killick, E. eds. 2010. *The Ways of Friendship.* Oxford: Berghahn; Nisbett, N. 2007. 'Friendship, consumption, morality: practising identity, negotiating hierarchy in middle-class Bangalore.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13(4): 935–50; Osella, C. and Osella, F. 1998. 'Friendship and flirting: micro-politics in Kerala, South India.' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(2): 189–206; Nakassis, C. V. 2013. 'Youth masculinity, "style" and the peer group in Tamil Nadu, India.' *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 47(2): 245–69.
51 Alm, B. 2010. 'Creating followers, gaining patrons: Leadership strategies in a Tamil Nadu village', in Price, P. and Rudd, A. E. eds. *Power and Influence in India. Bosses, Lords and Captains*: 1–19. New Delhi: Routledge.
52 In Tamil 'kutty' means 'little one', a term used in intimate circles.
53 'Mother' in Tamil.
54 The Tamil term for your mother's younger sister (i.e. an aunt).
55 This Tamil phrase translates as 'little younger brother'.
56 Nakassis, C. V. and Dean, M. A. 2007. 'Desire, youth, and realism in Tamil cinema.' *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 17(1): 77–104.

Chapter 5

1 The system of arranged marriage has been practised for centuries in India. When boys and girls reach a marriageable age, their parents or guardians choose an appropriate partner based on aspects such as religion, caste, subcaste and natal charts. See Caldwell, J. C., Reddy, P. H. and Caldwell, P. 1983. 'The causes of marriage change in South India.' *Population Studies* 37(3): 343–61; de González, L. T. 2013. 'Modern Arranged Marriage in Mumbai.' *Teaching Anthropology: SACC Notes* 34.
2 Wallman, S. ed. 1979. *Social anthropology of work* 19. London: Academic Press.
3 Baba, M. L. 1998. 'The anthropology of work in the Fortune 1000: a critical retrospective.' *Anthropology of Work Review* 18(4): 17–28; Nash, J. 1998. 'Twenty Years of the Anthropology of Work: Changes in the State of the World and the State of the Arts.' *Anthropology of Work Review* 18(4): 1–6.
4 Wallman, S. ed. 1979; Ortiz, S. 1994. 'Work, the division of labour and co-operation', in Ingold, T. ed. *Companion encyclopaedia of anthropology*. Oxford: Routledge.
5 Wallman, S. ed. 1979.
6 Wallman, S., ed. 1979; Baba, M. L. 1998; Jordan, A. T. 2012. *Business anthropology*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
7 Parry, J. P. 2001. 'Ankalu's errant wife: sex, marriage and industry in contemporary Chhattisgarh.' *Modern Asian Studies* 35(4): 783–820; Parry, J. P. 1999. Introduction. In Parry, J. P., Breman, J. and Kapadia, K. *The worlds of Indian industrial labour*. London: Sage Publications; Freeman, C. 2000. 'High tech and high heels in the global economy: Women, work, and pink-collar identities in the Caribbean.' Durham, NC: Duke University Press; De Neve, G. 2005. *The everyday politics of labour: Working lives in India's informal economy*. New Delhi: Social Science Press; Moeran, B. 2005. *The business of ethnography: Strategic exchanges, people and organizations*. London: Bloomsbury Academic; Broadbent, S. 2011. *L'intimité au travail*. Limoges, France: FYP éditions.
8 Grint, K. 2005. *The sociology of work: introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
9 Broadbent, S. 2011.
10 Broadbent, S. 2011.
11 Swallow, D. A. 1982. 'Production and control in the Indian garment export industry', in Goody, E. N. ed. *From Craft to Industry: the Ethnography of Proto-industrial Cloth Production*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 133–65.
12 De Neve, G. 2005.
13 Ortiz, S. 1994; Mirchandani, K. 1999. 'Feminist insight on gendered work: New directions in research on women and entrepreneurship.' *Gender, Work & Organization* 6(4): 224–35; Williams, J. 2001. *Unbending gender: Why family and work conflict and what to do about it*. New York: Oxford University Press.
14 Choudhary, R. 1971. *Kautilya's political ideas and institutions*. New Delhi: Chowkhamba Sanskrit Series Office; Buhler, G. 2004. *The laws of manu*. New Delhi: Genesis Publishing Pvt Ltd.; Gopal, T. B. 1976. *Niti Shastra*. Agra: Ratan Prakashan Mandir. The idea of formal spaces in these texts was specific to Brahmins' ritual spaces and to court halls, which were treated as holy and formal spaces and were cordoned off from other non-religious and informal activities.
15 The beginning of industrialisation in India can be traced back to the late nineteenth century.
16 Fuller, C. J. 1996. In Fuller, C. J. ed. *Caste today*. New York: Oxford University Press. 1–31.
17 Ambedkar, B. R. 1944; Pillay, K. P. K. 1977. *The Caste System in Tamil Nadu*. Chennai: University of Madras.
18 Ambedkar, B. R. 1944; Pillay, K. P. K. 1977.
19 Wiser, W. H. 1988. *The Hindu jajmani system*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt Ltd; Gould, H. A. 1986. 'The Hindu jajmani system: a case of economic particularism.' *Journal of anthropological research* 42(3): 269–78; Kolenda, P. 1963. 'Toward a model of the Hindu Jajmani system.' *Human Organization* 22(1): 11–31; Commander, S. 1983. 'The jajmani system in North India: an examination of its logic and status across two centuries.' *Modern Asian Studies* 17(2): 283–311.

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21 De Neve, G. 2005. The Vanniyars and Vellala Gounder castes may also be classified as belonging to Most Backward Castes and Backward Castes respectively.
22 Trade opportunities, along with a cosmological understanding of their duty to society, have traditionally combined to offer and stipulate opportunities for certain caste groups to perform certain work. However, this works only for groups that have not faced the social discrimination and exploitation experienced by, for instance, the Dalits. For a better understanding of family, kinship and caste in formal and informal work environments in India see Niehoff, A. H. 1959. *Factory workers in India.* PhD dissertation. Board of Trustees, Milwaukee Public Museum; Vidyarthi, L. P. 1984. In Vidyarthi, L. P. ed. *Applied anthropology in India: principles, problems, and case studies.* New Delhi: Kitab Mahal; Swallow. D. A. 2008; Holmström, M. 1976. *South Indian factory workers: Their life and their world*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Parry, J. 1999; Harriss-White, B. 2003. *India working: Essays on society and economy* 8. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; De Neve, G. 2005; Bear, L. 2007. *Lines of the nation: Indian Railway workers, bureaucracy, and the intimate historical self.* New York: Columbia University Press; Breman, J. 2013. *At work in the informal economy of India: a perspective from the bottom up.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. There is a large amount of literature concerned with understanding work in the midst of caste and class in Indian rural and urban life. Of particular interest for South Indian contexts see Srinivas, M. N. 1962. *Caste in modern India and other essays*. New Delhi: Asia Publishing House; Fuller, C. J. 1996; Reiniche, M. L. 1996. 'The urban dynamics of caste: a case study from Tamil Nadu', in Fuller, C. J. ed. *Caste today.* New York: Oxford University Press. 124–49; Dirks, N. 1996. 'Recasting Tamil society: The politics of caste and race in contemporary southern India', in Fuller, C. J. ed. *Caste today.* New York: Oxford University Press. 263–95; Beteille, A. 1965. *Caste, class, and power: Changing patterns of stratification in a Tanjore village*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. Osella, F. and Osella, C. 2000. *Social mobility in Kerala: modernity and identity in conflict*. London: Pluto Press.
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28 Vidyarthi, L. P. 1984.
29 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chota_Nagpur_Plateau
30 Holmstrom, M. 1976.
31 De Neve, G. 2005; Vidyarthi, L. P. 1984.
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35 Bear, L. 2007.
36 Holmstrom, M. 1976.
37 Swallow, D. A. 2008.
38 IT: Information Technology; ITES: Information Technology Enabled Services.
39 Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. 2007.
40 Nisbett, N. 2009.
41 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolic_capital
42 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbolic_capital
43 Arora, A. and Athreye, S. 2002. 'The software industry and India's economic development.' *Information Economics and Policy 14*(2): 253–73; Upadhya, C. and Vasavi, A. R. 2006. *Work, culture, and sociality in the Indian IT industry: a sociological study.* Bangalore: National Institute of Advanced Studies, Indian Institute of Science Campus, Bangalore; Nisbett, N. 2009.

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45 Das, G. 2002. Arora, A. and Athreye, S. 2002; Upadhya, C. and Vasavi, A. R. 2006.
46 De Neve, G. 2005.
47 De Neve, G. 2005.
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49 Annapoorna, S. and Bagalkoti, S. T. 2011. 'Increasing Women Employment in IT Industry: An Analysis of Reasons.' *International Journal of Research in Commerce, IT and Management* 1(5): 87–9; Arora, A. and Athreye, S. 2002.
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52 Friedman, T. 2005. *The world is flat*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; Upadhya, C. and Vasavi, A. R. 2006; Fuller, C. J. and Narasimhan, H. 2007; Nisbett, N. 2009.
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55 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knowledge_process_outsourcing
56 Even taxi drivers sent to pick up Western clients from the airport or hotel were sometimes given instruction in basic English, so that they could communicate with clients while travelling.
57 Employees were required to wear formal business dress only if they were involved in meetings with clients.
58 This system allows employees to rotate between different work stations; they are not based in a particular cubicle (a practice more common in larger companies which offers a bit more privacy). Joroff, M. L., Porter, W. L., Feinberg, B. and Kukla, C. 2003. 'The agile workplace.' *Journal of Corporate Real Estate* 5(4): 293–311.
59 Fayard, A.L. and Weeks, J. 2007. 'Photocopiers and water-coolers: The affordances of informal interaction.' *Organization studies* 28(5): 605–34.
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62 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chennai_Super_Kings
63 Donner, J. 2007. 'The rules of beeping: exchanging messages via intentional "missed calls" on mobile phones.' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13(1): 1–22.
64 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013.
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66 This was confirmed by three nursery school co-ordinators, as well as by a quick count of children dropped off at school by their fathers over three working days each week for a two-week period. The average for the households of working families turned out to be: 41 per cent of young children were dropped by fathers on their way to work; 27 per cent by their mothers; 24 per cent by their grandparents; and 8 per cent by a childminder.
67 An equal division of domestic work between working fathers and mothers is still far away.
68 More on the occupations of the so-called lower castes and the inhuman discrimination they face is best captured in https://www.hrw.org/reports/2001/globalcaste/caste0801-03.htm and https://www.britannica.com/topic/untouchable. For more on caste and occupations see http://countrystudies.us/india/89.htm
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74 Vidyarthi, L. P. 1984; De Neve, G. 2005.
75 Ambedkar, B. R. 1944.
76 Miller, D. et al. 2016.

Chapter 6

1 A non-profit educational organisation that produces mini lectures on YouTube, as well as teaching materials for schools. It can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection.
2 An online retailer such as amazon.com.
3 A popular Tamil film song that speaks to people taking and sharing selfies.
4 A very famous actor from Tamil cinema (see also Chapter 3).
5 For topics such as politics and the state see Costa, E. 2016. *Social Media in South East Turkey*. London: UCL Press, and Haynes, N. 2016. *Social Media in Northern Chile*. London: UCL Press. For religion and commerce see Miller, D. 2016. *Social Media in an English Village*. London: UCL Press.
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7 For example see Konana, P. and Balasubramanian, S. 2002. 'India as a knowledge economy: aspirations versus reality.' *Frontline* 19(2), 65–9.
8 A similar case of aspirations in a knowledge economy in Malaysia is discussed in Lepawsky, J. 2005. 'Digital Aspirations: Malaysia and the Multimedia Super Corridor.' *FOCUS on Geography* 48(3): 10–18.
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10 As seen in Chapter 1, although not all of the new middle-class population in this area do work in IT the perception is that they are all associated with the IT companies, and that their prosperity is due to their employment in this sector.
11 https://www.khanacademy.org/
12 Open courseware refers to course lessons created by universities and made available for free over the internet. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/OpenCourseWare
13 Information and communication technologies in schools can be smart classrooms, computer labs etc.
14 For an overview of the Indian school system and its progress see Kingdon, G. G . 2007. 'The progress of school education in India.' *Oxford Review of Economic Policy* 23(2): 168–95; Venkatanarayanan, S. 2015. 'Economic Liberalization in 1991 and Its Impact on Elementary Education in India.' *SAGE Open* 5(2): DOI: 10.1177/2158244015579517; Asadullah, M. N.,

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15 http://www.samacheerkalvi.in/
16 http://cbse.nic.in/
17 http://www.cie.org.uk/programmes-and-qualifications/cambridge-secondary-2/cambridge-igcse/
18 A third-grade student in an affluent international school may end up paying around Rs. 150,000/– (around £1,500) for a year in fees alone – pretty costly by the standards of normal middle-class incomes in India.
19 This is based on the medium of instruction in the schools.
20 Annamalai, E. 2004. 'Medium of power: The question of English in education in India', in Tollefson, J. W. and Tsui, A. B. M. eds. *Medium of Instruction Policies – Which Agenda? Whose Agenda*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 177–94.
21 Thompson, C. 2011. 'How Khan Academy is changing the rules of education.' *Wired Magazine* 126: 1–5.
22 For an examination of research into use of SNS in UK Formal Educational Settings see Facer, K. and Selwyn, N. 2010. 'Social Networking – Key messages from the Research.' Sharpe, R., Beetham, H. and de Freitas, S. eds. *Rethinking Learning for a Digital Age*. 31–42.
23 Compulsory education for children is stipulated until the age of 14 in India, so this age has somehow become associated with the age of accessing Facebook for these schools. In fact Facebook actually allows children to become members of the site from the age of 13.
24 For an examination of why students are on social networks see Cheung, C. M., Chiu, P. Y. and Lee, M. K. 2011. 'Online social networks: Why do students use Facebook?' *Computers in Human Behavior* 27(4): 1337–43.
25 For an examination of YouTube as a knowledge resource in different contexts, see Burke, S. C. and Snyder, S. L. 2008. 'YouTube: An Innovative Learning Resource for College Health Education Courses.' *International Electronic Journal of Health Education* 11: 39–46; Duffy, P. 2008. 'Engaging the YouTube Google-eyed generation: Strategies for using Web 2.0 in teaching and learning.' *The Electronic Journal of e-Learning* 6(2): 119–30.
26 A similar finding was discussed by Roblyer, M. D. et al. 2010. 'Findings on Facebook in higher education: A comparison of college faculty and student uses and perceptions of social networking sites.' *The Internet and Higher Education* 13(3): 134–40. Here the college faculty believed social networking sites to have only a social function and no instructional purpose.
27 As discussed in earlier chapters, young unmarried women belonging to certain classes were restricted from using smartphones, which were the primary means of accessing social media. For a general idea of masculinity and education in India see Jeffrey, C., Jeffery, P. and Jeffery, R. 2008. *Degrees without freedom? Education, masculinities and unemployment in north India*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
28 Members of the lower socio-economic classes viewed the internet as a symbol of knowledge. For them acquiring the skill to use it signified potential freedom from everyday struggles. For an idea of how the internet in itself can be viewed as a symbol of potential freedom see Miller, D. and Slater, D. 2000. *The Internet: an ethnographic approach*. Oxford: Berg.
29 Digital Video Disc – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/DVD
30 Buckingham, D. 2013. 'Digital Childhoods? New Media and Children's Culture.' *Beyond technology: children's learning in the age of digital culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
31 For a discussion of the issues surrounding the act of friending students from a teacher's perspective in a university environment see Raynes-Goldie, K. and Lloyd, C. 2014. 'Unfriending Facebook? Challenges From an Educator's Perspective', in Kent, M. and Leaver, T., eds. *An education in Facebook? Higher education and the world's largest social network*. Oxford: Routledge. 153–61.
32 The teachers referred to articles such as http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/explain-how-children-open-facebook-other-accounts-delhi-high-court-to-govt/1107592/, in which 18 seems to be the stipulated age to open a Facebook account. However, the association of Facebook activity with the concluding age for compulsory education, namely 14 years, was also apparent, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

33 Such views are also related to informal education that could be gained through social media. This is discussed in a comparative perspective by Miller, D. et al. 2016.
34 More about surveillance is discussed by Miller, D. et al. 2016. This work also explores why in certain countries social media was seen as a platform for surveillance by schools, concluding that in China it was apparently so, due to the functionalities offered by Chinese social media platforms.
35 During the latter part of the field work an official WhatsApp group for a couple of schools seemed to be created, with one official school phone number.
36 Miller, D. et al. 2016.

Chapter 7

1 Though one can always argue that even such functional interactions could be considered a part of sociality. The idea here is to stress that such exchanges were not seen as a peer-to-peer process of building sociality.
2 Although it indirectly resulted in Darshan and Naga acquiring status and respect within their own community, their gesture was ultimately for the benefit of their community.
3 McPherson, M. 2001.
4 Mandelbaum, D. G. 1970. *Society in India: Continuity and change*, vol.1. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press; Mayer, A. 1996. 'Caste in an Indian village: change and continuity 1954–1992', in Fuller, C. J. ed. *Caste today*. New York: Oxford University Press. 32–64.
5 Beteille, A. 1996; Fuller, C. J., ed. 1996.
6 Fuller, C. J. ed. 1996.
7 Jeffrey, R. and Doron, A. 2013. *Cell phone nation: How mobile phones have revolutionized business, politics and ordinary life in India*. New Delhi: Hachette.
8 Chapter 5 gives a more in-depth view of the IT sector at Panchagrami.
9 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
10 This could take the form of selfies or posed photographs taken by others. Though selfies do not have an offline precedent, the idea of posting pictures of oneself does have a continuity with an offline practice.
11 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2012. *Migration and new media: Transnational families and polymedia*. Oxford: Routledge.
12 Miller, D. et al. 2016.
13 Rainie, H. and Wellman, B. 2012. *Networked: The new social operating system*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. 58.
14 Laughey, D. 2007; Gottdiener, M. et al. 2015
15 Madianou, M. and Miller, D. 2013.
16 Miller, D. et al. 2016.

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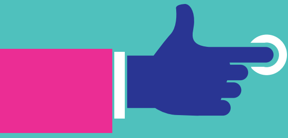

One of the first ethnographic studies to explore the use of social media in the everyday lives of people in Tamil Nadu, *Social Media in South India* provides an understanding of this subject in a region experiencing rapid transformation. The influx of IT companies over the past decade into what was once a space dominated by agriculture has resulted in a complex juxtaposition between an evolving knowledge economy and the traditions of rural life. While certain class tensions have emerged in response to this juxtaposition, a study of social media in the region suggests that similarities have also transpired, observed most clearly in the blurring of boundaries between work and life for both the old residents and the new.

Venkatraman explores the impact of social media at home, work and school, and analyses the influence of class, caste, age and gender on how, and which, social media platforms are used in different contexts. These factors, he argues, have a significant effect on social media use, suggesting that social media in South India, while seeming to induce societal change, actually remains bound by local traditions and practices.

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