Children's Digital Experiences in Indian Slums

Technologies, Identities, and Jugaad

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To Julian
The love and light of my life,
The wind under my wings,
My absolute everything.
Thank you for choosing me!

To Mumma and Papa
The most present people in my life.
Thank you for being my salvation!

To Didi
My loudest cheerleader and kindest critic.
Thank you for being my soulmate!

To JJ
My first child.
His warmth and companionship make me a better human!

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1 Introduction

Abstract

In this chapter, I question the common assumptions and dominant discussions on poor children's digital lives. Popular narratives on poor children in global South countries emphasise that the proliferation of digital technologies can tackle poverty, discrimination, and other social inequities. These narratives embed neoliberal logic and argue that children are either victims of digital technologies and need protection or are self-motivated to use these technologies for empowerment and development purposes. Poor children's engagements with digital technologies exceed binary categories of analysis such as resistance–oppression and agency–subjection. Contrary to these dominant explanations, the chapter makes a case that poor children in India are globally oriented, locally grounded, exploitative and exploited, ambitious and leisure-driven, creative and innovative.

Keywords: *jugaad*, poverty of resources, digital leisure, resilience, global South, India

More than eight million children live in low-income neighbourhoods in India, with a monthly family income of ten dollars. Children in these urban sprawls have acquired access to affordable digital technologies, including smartphones, laptops, personal computers, and data packages. They labour long hours every day to earn daily wages—as domestic workers, waitpersons, delivery persons, garbage collectors, and street hawkers. Even still, they spend a large portion of their limited time and meagre income on their smartphones, scrolling through social media, chatting with their friends, gossiping about relatives, surveilling their neighbours, and cultivating connections (Arora, 2019; Rangaswamy & Nair, 2010).

Unbeknownst to the quotidian digital experiences of poor children and people, popular narratives explore the possibility of tackling poverty, discrimination, and other social inequities through digital technologies.

Developmental agencies, government policies, not-for-profit organisations, and corporate offers and services in low-income settlements in India embed the assumption that digital access is a great leveller. It is not a stretch to argue that different organisations working in low-income settlements in India adopt the conservative definition of development promoted by research in the field of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). For a long time, research on the role of ICTs in resource-constrained contexts of the global South has continued to use a socio-economic framework for the analysis of development goals (Burrell and Anderson, 2009) within which the functions, serviceability, and mobilisation of ICTs are limited to a traditional, scientific and West-focused understanding of development and progress. Scholarship, state programmes and policies, and corporate offerings promoting a conservative and neoliberal understanding of ICT for development (ICT4D) are thus designed to impact entire communities/populations through ICT interventions. Accordingly, the research outcomes of these projects are built on sweeping generalisations and suggest actionable insights for the masses (Hart, 2011). However, there is a need to move away from conceptualising entire populations (rural India or the Third World) as sharing a set of non-complex and generalisable lived experiences that can be redirected or controlled through large-scale policies and interventions. A more effective approach is to design pluralistic, complex, and multi-faceted accounts of people, groups, and cultures (Narayan et al., 2000) to enable more community-specific/grassroots participation in the meaning-making process, i.e., how ICTs are localised, used, and modified through quotidian and people-centred approaches and needs.

Studies on information and communication technologies for development have also fuelled the assumption that the desire to overcome impoverishment exclusively shapes poor people's life choices. Accordingly, people in resource-constrained environments are inherently inclined to capitalise on their access to digital technologies for neoliberal purposes: employment, healthcare, education, and so on. Reinforcing this assumption through continued private/public investments and research efforts towards projects that identify poor people as utility-driven beings limits our ability to identify the full spectrum of technology-related practices that engage new users and young people in emerging markets. Scholarship with such a narrow analytical lens defining development goals for digital media users in resource-constrained environments cannot explore "the diverse ways in which the poor and the marginalized use media technologies in their everyday lives for social networking, entertainment, to produce and participate in intimate and erotic economies, and to express and experience

their sexuality, relationships, pleasure and intimacy in ways that could also be considered empowering" (Ganesh, 2010; p. 3). Poor people and communities in the global South are not an anomaly. Users in the global South do not exclusively prioritise their socioeconomic or development goals while engaging with digital technologies (Arora and Rangaswamy, 2013, 2014; Ganesh, 2010; Kavoori and Arceneaux, 2006, Mitra and Rana, 2002). Poor people's use of technologies unfolds in unpredictable ways because users with distinct cultures, histories, values, aspirations, and realities confer social value on ICTs through careful "configuration, mediation, and active interpretation" (Pinch and Bijker, 1984). For example, low-income youth in Kenya use their mobile phones to watch movie trailers (Wyche, 2013); an Internet centre in a small town of Ecuador stays in business by transferring ringtones to mobile phones (Salvador et al., 2005), and farmers in rural India use their mobile phones to receive updates on crop prices and weather while simultaneously consuming large quantities of porn online (Ganesh, 2010). Recent studies of ICTs in the global South have challenged the dominant assumption that poor people's digital media use is merely utilitarian and driven by socio-economic goals and neoliberal aspirations (Arora, 2010, 2019; Donner, 2009; Rangaswamy and Arora, 2016; Smyth et al., 2010). Some of the key arguments from this emerging line of research are: before ICTs are localised as tools of utility, they are used as leisure avenues; leisure-driven explorations of ICTs can serve as a precursor to developing digital literacies and skills; and mundane/repetitive use of ICTs for leisure and entertainment can ensure immersive adoption of technologies.

I draw on these recent developments in research on technologies and the global poor to rethink new media practices among vulnerable children in the slums of India. I argue that poor children in India are globally oriented, locally grounded, exploitative and exploited, ambitious and leisure-driven, creative and innovative. I demystify the top-down fiction generated by media corporations, the state, and other institutions of power about the digital life of poor children in India.

My thinking about the digital lives of children in India's slums draws theoretical force from the foundational work of many global South scholars who have initiated a sustained exploration of the digital lives of the global poor beyond the West and in countries of India, China, South Africa, Brazil, and the Middle East. Contemporary scholarship in the field debunks three dominant myths about poor people in the global South (Arora, 2019). The first myth is that poor people from low-income contexts are motivated to use digital technologies solely for development and empowerment. It reinforces an age-old worldview that utilitarian motivations drive poor people, so they

should actively and continuously strive to improve their lives in neoliberal ways. Another critical assumption is that the progressive fabric of digital technologies and the attendant culture of decentralised participation will encourage poor people to practice self-reliance and empower themselves. Finally, recent global South-centred scholarship challenges a core assumption that poor people are ready to settle for sub-par digital products and services because they have less spending capacity. Arora (2019) argues that the global poor spend marginally larger portions of their income and savings on purchasing digital technologies and services than users from middle- and high-income backgrounds. It is, therefore, critical to acknowledge that the global poor, who constitute the next billion users of digital technologies, will increasingly dominate the market share for several digital products and services in the near future. Governments, companies, and policymakers should consider the global poor as authentic and legitimate users of digital technologies, thus ideating plans, inclusive experiences, and policies to support their needs and wants.

I build on this scholarship to argue that, on the one hand, poor children's digital lives are conceived through salvific and paternalistic narratives in which corporates, governments, and people use digital technologies to save and empower vulnerable children. Poor children are labelled victims and subjected to protectionist frameworks, techniques, and policies created by the government, corporations, not-for-profit organisations, and charity institutions. Labour-intensive childhoods are conceptualised as stories of oppression, exploitation, and a lack of agency and voice among children. These discussions are also rooted in the risk/opportunity paradigm (Cassidy et al., 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2020; Livingstone & Smith, 2014; Sarwatay et al., 2021). Accordingly, children require adult protection to mitigate risks and foster a positive relationship with digital technologies. Governments, educational institutions, policymakers, and corporations constantly introduce technological interventions to save poor children from global humiliation for not meeting the West-sanctioned standards of progress.

The second normative approach to understanding children's digital lives unpacks how millions of children resist oppression, violence, and subjugation. Poor children are thus neo-liberal subjects in these universalising conversations on the potential of digital technologies. Per this understanding, children can challenge and subvert power hierarchies in their families, communities, and societies. Therefore, the focus is on exploring how children use digital technologies for neo-liberal purposes, including efforts to question authority, acquire higher education, build online and

multi-literacies, search for better jobs, and accomplish class mobility (Burn et al., 2010; Choi, 2016; De Abreu et al., 2016).

Poor children in the global South are either digital natives/active subjects (of change) or passive witnesses (of violence and discrimination). The neoliberal myth of a technologically empowered young person or the assumption that children are vulnerable and require protection ignores the essential concerns about children's social identities, community norms, and family dynamics and how these influence their digital engagements.

In low-income contexts of poor children's lives in India, questions related to technology, such as ownership, access, use, and privacy, are implicated with complex socio-cultural issues and political realities dominant in their local communities. In recent years, research focusing on the global South has begun challenging these hegemonic constructs in the literature on children's digital engagements. The book builds on this provocation and establishes a need to rethink children's digital engagements as more than a developmental project to save the poor in low-income neighbourhoods from systems of discrimination and violence. It debunks universalising theories and binary notions and provides fresh narratives on novel ethnographic categories, such as romance, privacy, surveillance, shame, glamour, and creativity, in its exploration of children's quotidian digital experiences. A view of children's digital engagements emerges at multiple scales, and above all, within low-income and digitally accessible environments initiating new reflexivity about poverty and the influence of social identities—complete with risks and obligations.

Children's Digital Experiences in Indian Slums offers complex stories on how children's social identities (gender, caste, and religion), cultural norms, and personal aspirations influence their digital experiences. Throughout the book, I explore two significant questions: How do children challenge, circumvent, or reinforce the dominant sociocultural norms in using digital technologies? What can we learn about digital technologies and poor children's lived realities and aspirations in the urban sprawls of India? I answer these questions ethnographically by documenting how children access technologies, inhabit online spaces, and personalise their digital experiences—online networks and identity—based on their values and aspirations. The book traces my journey of over five years of full-time research from 2015 to 2019 in Bangalore, Delhi, and Mumbai. It archives the emergence and proliferation of affordable digital technologies in the lives of poor children in the slums of Munnekollal, Seemapuri, and Azad Nagar. It is built on synthesising ethnographic and media material to analyse how poor children narrate their novel and quotidian encounters with digital

technologies. I focus on contexts not often examined in studies on poor children and technologies in the global South, including the productive associations between their social identities, lived realities, and digital engagements. Prioritising children's felt experiences, documented in the form of online and offline dialogues, conversations, and interpersonal communication, illustrate my writing experiment configured to infuse empathy, nuance, and authenticity in the narratives enclosed within this book. I problematise simplistic and essentialist approaches commonly used to make sense of the potential of digital technologies and poor children's agency and creativity in the era of a Digital India.

I utilise insights from studies on innovation, expression, and sociality to argue that poor children's material realities, community relations, and aspirations for leisure, class mobility, and belongingness profoundly shape their engagements with digital technologies. Children actively contended with two complex and competing motivations in their digital engagements.

On the one hand, children conform to the social norms around gender, religion, caste, and class as they access digital technologies and inhabit online spaces. They use digital technologies to reinforce their religious beliefs, caste identities, and gender norms. Conversely, children only temporarily question and flout sociocultural guidelines to fulfil personal aspirations because they want to maintain the social rewards they acquire due to their overt and performed compliance with the dominant norms in their society. The book examines this messy relationship between compliance and resistance, subordination and autonomy, and submission and disruption. Children in low-income urban neighbourhoods of India design and adopt a wide range of strategies to selectively defy the existing norms and forms of conduct around their social identities. Given the complexity of their aspirations, values, and everyday realities, their digital engagements reflect a unique combination of resistive and submissive practices. The book's central thesis is that poor children's engagements with digital technologies exceed and transcend binary categories of analysis such as resistance–oppression and agency–submission. Also, a critical look at their digital engagements reflects how children organically demystify popular narratives that categorise them as neoliberal subjects who use digital technologies to self-propel toward development and empowerment. Many girls in the urban slums, for example, used digital technologies to express their religious identity as devout Muslims and posted their photos wearing a hijab. They also questioned the religious and patriarchal norms in their families that prevented girls and women from using or owning smartphones with Internet access. I foreground the nuances and complexities in children's digital engagements to offer a glimpse into a

new form of negotiation—both the strategic preservation of the dominant norms of conduct and sustained-quotidian efforts to challenge them. I define these negotiation strategies as *jugaad*, a Hindi term I came across during my conversations with children describing frugal creativity and solutions to overcome or navigate constraints imposed by social identities and norms on their engagements with digital technologies. They negotiate with the socio-culturally imposed limitations without explicitly challenging or subverting the dominant guidelines of conduct in their communities. Even when they challenge the dominant gender, religion, caste, or class norms to access or inhabit digital technologies and online spaces, their resistance is subtle, short-lived, and enacted for personal goals and motivations. When these goals are met, the children withdraw to the confines and comforts of conducting themselves per the dominant norms. The book introduces and unpacks the concept of *jugaad* to explore the different negotiation strategies children design to access, use, and make sense of digital technologies in slum communities.

Jugaad: Negotiating Resource Constraints

Children in the slum settlements of Mumbai, Delhi, and Bangalore often used the term *jugaad* to describe the strategies they used to negotiate with the constraints experienced due to their economic and sociocultural realities. Their negotiations involved a wide range of tactics, from frugal innovations, creative solutions, and experimentation to quotidian playfulness. My theorisation of *jugaad* as negotiation does not foreground the concept of children's resilience, i.e., their ability to cope and survive in situations of intense violence and systemic discrimination. Many scholars embed their understanding of *jugaad* in the resilience framework and provide insights into how poor people rely on their creativity and ingenuity to overcome an ongoing crisis. The resilience framework presupposes the "resourcefulness of the poor" (Rocha, 2020, p. 2) and their capacity to adapt to adverse changes in their lives and communities. Resilience is also a signifier of the neoliberal ways of thinking and becoming; it does not attend to the uncompromising effects of existing power relations, manifest as institutions, governments, and corporations, that produce and sustain poverty (Shaikh & Kauppi, 2020). A resilience-centred framework assumes a return to the original state of homeostasis after adversity (Manyena et al., 2011; Alexander, 2013). Returning to homeostasis after dealing with adversity due to systemic discrimination and violence may not always be possible. What is often unseen and ignored is

that resilient individuals and communities may survive adversity. However, it does not mean they remain unharmed and unaffected by the impact of the changes (McDonnell, 2020). Also, already marginalised individuals and communities cannot continue to be resilient when facing long-term government neglect, a history of violence, and systemic discrimination (Lewis & Kelman, 2015). People's resilience in resource-poor contexts is often described as a survival strategy, an innovative technique to meet the basic requirements of life (Bahadur et al., 2010) and to overcome vulnerabilities (Adger & Kelly, 1999). Where *jugaad* is understood as resilience, poor people are defined as utility-driven neoliberal subjects determined to overcome economic limitations and resource poverty using technologies for education, employment, business, healthcare, and other neoliberal purposes.

I depart from this understanding of *jugaad* as resilience and survival and suggest that poor children negotiate with power relations and economic constraints not just for survival; they use *jugaad* for entertainment, to realise their aspirations for cultural and class mobility, leisure, and socialisation. Poor children's creative workarounds to dodge obstacles in their digital engagements are not merely a response to the lack of resources in the urban slums of India. They also negotiate with the norms and behavioural expectations associated with their social identities, such as gender, religion, and caste. They continuously engage these social identities against the backdrop of resource challenges, unstable infrastructures, communities with different and multiple literacies, and intergenerational trauma caused by systemic poverty. Even as children negotiate with resource poverty and socioeconomic and cultural constraints in their lives, they prioritise their leisure, entertainment, aspirations, and interpersonal relationships, sometimes more than their need to self-preserve and survive. It does not mean that entertainment and leisure supersede their need for food, shelter, and safety. Instead, I argue for the need to decentre the survival narrative that predominantly influences our understanding of poor children's desires, aspirations, and digital practices. Poor children are ingenuous and develop creative workarounds not just to earn their meals or for shelter; they design and innovate constantly to buy data packages for their mobile phones, download songs and movies for entertainment, and romance their lovers.

Jugaad is not poor children's resilience to survive through adaption in the face of adversities. *Jugaad* is the point of departure from the "poverty of resources"—a framework used to describe the resourcefulness of poor people, towards a method well-suited to identify the limits and implications of negotiating with either adversities or existing power relationships. It allows scholars to move past a conceptualisation of agency as a subversion

of existing norms and social identity enactments to create radically new and alternative lifestyles and behaviours among children. While explicitly subversive practices are often considered natural and expected responses to a difficult situation or crisis, *jugaad* is the quotidian and playful negotiations that poor children initiate to fulfil their aspirations and desires for leisure, belongingness, love, friendship, glamour, and entertainment. While poor children also have a toolbox of survival strategies, introducing the concept of *jugaad* offers a new perspective into the digital lives of poor children and attempts to humanise their everyday experiences with digital technologies. *Jugaad,* as a mentality and method (set of negotiation strategies), pays attention to those aspects of children's lives that are rendered illegible within a neoliberal thinking that essentialises poor people as utilitarian subjects. The neoliberal logic describes poor children as independent individuals resisting power so they can practice free will. On the other hand, scholars, governments, and corporations have time and again created salvific narratives to ascribe the poor with agentic capabilities (Spivak, 2005). Neoliberal narratives of resilience legitimise and encourage poor children's agency only if their conduct aligns with the institutionally approved actions of a self-empowered subject. The neoliberal concept of agency is thus confined to questions of victimhood and subversion. Such a narrow understanding of agency may also lead to a failure to recognise distinct forms of resistance, agentic potential, and identity enactments in culturally diverse environments.

The neoliberal framework compelling agentic possibilities onto poor people and other marginalised groups and communities often renders non-binary and complex aspects of children's digital lives illegible to analysis and documentation (Butler, 1997). *Jugaad* as a mentality makes visible how children use their agency as a strategic and constitutive force to not only challenge or resist but also to reinforce and inhabit the existing norms and power relations in their communities. *Jugaad* inheres to context-specific and personal actions and enables children to engage with, make sense of, and challenge or reinforce norms, practices, beliefs, relations, and discourses. As a mentality, *jugaad* encapsulates creativity, low-cost innovations, experimentation, and strategies to bend the rules for personal desires and goals. My reading of *jugaad* acknowledges the ambiguity surrounding the workarounds. The workarounds are ambiguous because they are context-specific and personal. They are driven by diverse motivations ranging from navigating resource constraints and harnessing a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) and entrepreneurial potential to challenging the limits imposed by existing systems or acquiring social rewards through compliance with the norms.

The aspiration to design a workaround may also flirt with illegal practices to topple the status quo or question the capitalist and top-down governance and regulation of digital technologies and spaces. My rendition of *jugaad* is, therefore, children-centred and informed by their lived experiences, social identity enactments, and interpersonal relationships in resource-constrained settings of urban slums in India. It highlights the chasm between the government, not-for-profit, and corporations' vision of what digital technologies can do for poor children and how children use, repurpose, and refigure these technologies in urban slums. Instead of focusing on innovation, which often creates long-term changes in systems and societies, my reading of *jugaad* attends to children's unusual and creative solutions to accomplishing everyday tasks or personal goals while navigating social, environmental, cultural, and economic constraints in their routines. Sometimes these unusual and creative solutions may resolve systemic problems, but children do not consider these long-term and institutional changes their primary objective when practising *jugaad.* For instance, children negotiate with the intersecting gender and class norms to fulfil the personal desire for class mobility or to gain access to digital technologies. Once children accomplish their goals, they might choose to reinforce the existing gender norms for self-preservation and continue receiving social rewards in the form of material and emotional support from the patriarchal communities and families they inhabit. In other words, *jugaad* is not revolutionary, resistive, or collective in nature. It emerges from an individual's desire to experience and selectively enact agency without explicitly subverting existing norms and authorities.

The *jugaad* mentality functions through quotidian makeshift workarounds, i.e., negotiation strategies, sometimes resulting in an easy solution to overcome an existing obstacle, at other times generating alternative visions of the future, causing long-term impact and changes. While the mentality may lead to both long- and short-term changes, the practice of *jugaad* manifests as negotiation strategies children design and deploy to access and use digital technologies from within the felt contours of their routines. *Jugaad*, as practice, does not presuppose radical improvements or alterations in communities, norms, and organisations that children inhabit. It can be understood as children's choices or decisions to uphold their desires and aspirations as they navigate the vast, informal, (il)legal, resource-constrained, and socio-culturally diverse contexts of their urban slums. These choices and decisions embed ambiguity as children continuously recycle resources and carve informal learning routes to practice agency against the backdrop of social, cultural, and economic limitations they face

and their desire to harness social rewards and networks through compliance with the dominant rationality.

I build on these arguments to define *jugaad* in relation to children's digital lives in the urban slums of India. *Jugaad* is a set of dynamic digital strategies children use to negotiate with the authority of gender-caste-religion-class power relations in society. *Jugaad* emerges from their experiences navigating disorganised online and offline contexts as the children embed their social identities, community relations, and everyday experiences in their digital engagements.

I base the definition of *jugaad* on three core arguments. First, children's engagements with digital technologies should not be limited to contexts and situations which are overtly political and disruptive. Children use *jugaad* in their digital engagements to simultaneously challenge and reinforce the dominant norms in the communities. At the surface level, they enact compliance while simultaneously fighting the norm in subtle and hidden ways. Second, children's intention to challenge or subvert the norms in their digital engagements is guided by personal desires. Their intention to subvert the norms in their engagements with digital technologies does not emerge from the desire to organise against the authorities collectively. Accordingly, the practice of *jugaad* does not intrinsically centre a political intentionality or desire to revolutionise existing conditions for everyone. Accordingly, *jugaad* is seldom collective or sustained and does not promise long-term changes. And finally, children's intention to challenge the norms does not translate into regular practice in autonomy across situations and people.

In dealing with limitations imposed on their digital engagements due to the social identities and class locations they inhabit, children seldom define their negotiation strategies as resistive or subversive. These strategies reflect the quotidian and complicated performances of desire and will. The negotiation strategies are context-specific, individualistic, and guided by the aspiration for personal gratification. These strategies should not be mistaken as dispersed enactments of a collective political goal to challenge gender, caste, class, or religious norms.

The framework of *jugaad* provides novel ways to analyse the co-existence of negotiation strategies designed to challenge and reinforce the dominant socio-cultural norms and expectations. It is critical in demystifying binary categories such as resistance–oppression and agency–oppression. Children's engagement with digital technologies is nestled in complicated instances of enacting autonomy and conforming with community-based norms and expectations. The simultaneous compliance and resistance of the dominant norms and existing power relationships cannot be captured

using simplistic categories and generalisable theories. Examining this phenomenon of simultaneity challenges binary classifications and helps identify the multiple and intersecting values and motivations guiding such complicated negotiations with digital technologies. For instance, *jugaad* can reveal how the punishment for defying the norms is reduced when children publicly practice some form of compliance.

Using *jugaad* as an analytical trope also allows me to chart the unknown theoretical boundaries between submission (to the dominant norms) and the aspirational reaching out (to create different possibilities of conduct). It involves examining children's digital engagements as strategic preservation of the prevailing norms of conduct and their sustained quotidian efforts to challenge them. *Jugaad* thus captures the problematics of subjectivation and agency from a gender-class-religion-caste-technology lens. It helps develop an ethnographic approach critical to appreciating the extent of diversity in children's lived realities. *Jugaad* is a testimony to individual creativity without falling into the trap of burdening poor people with the responsibility to empower themselves. I have used the concept of *jugaad* to understand and document how children interrupt precarious or unequal living conditions to support and fulfil personal desires and aspirations. They engage in careful experimentation, i.e., calculated and limited hacking of socio-cultural norms and identity expressions. *Jugaad* demystifies and renders weak gender, caste, religious, and class binaries. It also creates space to acknowledge that poor children from slum settlements possess the intellectual and creative ingenuity to use digital technologies for leisure or to fulfil personal aspirations and desires. Aspirational mobility, leisure, entertainment, and sociality are desired by the rich and poor alike.

The Digital Otherwise

According to the Census of India conducted in 2011, 68 million people, including 6.07 million children, live in slums in Indian cities. The United Nations (2003) defines slums as areas where residents lack durable housing, sufficient living space, secure tenure, and easy access to safe water or adequate sanitation facilities. Migration to urban areas for employment, education, healthcare, socioeconomic mobility, and a better lifestyle overall is a significant reason for the growth of cities and the attendant new forms of social hierarchies and systemic discrimination. From 2001 to 2011, the share of rural-to-urban migrants in the population rose from 5.06% to 6.5%.

In 2011, 54% of residents in Mumbai were migrants, 52% in Bangalore, and 42% in Delhi.

It is estimated that 19 million people in Mumbai, 13.8 million in Delhi, and 4.5 million in Bangalore live in congested residential areas unfit for human habitation. Governance structures, institutional policies, corporate investments, and market-related research often ignore the needs of low-income communities in these slum settlements. Even as people in slums deal with structural and institutional inadequacies, they spend much of their income to buy Internet data packages, smartphones, and other digital technologies. Census data on housing stock, amenities, and assets in slums in India indicate that 72.7% of households in slums own smartphones with an Internet connection. In comparison, only 66% of families have toilets at home. Increased private and public infrastructure investments, affordable corporate offerings, and government programmes to increase Internet connectivity at affordable rates have improved poor people's access to digital technologies and people's basic technical competencies to use technologies for various purposes. As a result, slums are emerging as dynamic sites where poor children are incredibly motivated to adopt, repurpose, and ascribe meaning to digital technologies in their daily lives.

In choosing slum settlements in Delhi, Mumbai, and Bangalore as my research sites, I make a case for acknowledging that poor children are legitimate users of digital technologies who dominate the current consumption of digital products and services and will influence the future uses/scope of these technologies. Exploring poor children's digital lives in urban slums of India reveals the nuanced relationships between their complex and varied aspirations, social identities, on/offline experiences, the existing digital infrastructures, economic and cultural resources, and opportunities to navigate the institutional and personal obstacles to technology engagements.

In 2015, I started hanging out with children and their families, relatives, friends, and community members in Azad Nagar, a slum cluster in Mumbai, India. I spent time with the participants in their homes, schools, neighbourhoods, and public places such as roads and at festival sites. An aerial image of this settlement will reveal the roofs of houses covered with blue plastic sheets—a type of covering used to prevent damage to the roofs and ceilings due to rainwater. Water was scarce, public roads outside the settlement were ruinous, and the open drainage system increased the infestation of insects and mosquitoes. Even the streets flooded, walls of the apartments leaked, and the floors in the houses were always damp during monsoon season every year.

The residential clusters in Azad Nagar were classified into two groups, i.e., *chawls* and *jhopadpatti*. *Chawls* are one- or two-story brick-and-mortar tenement houses, commonly led as *pukka houses*, that open into a shared courtyard and often consist of small one-bedroom apartments. Each apartment housed at least four to five members, and the families often kept their doors and windows open for ventilation. Many people living in the *chawls* owned or had access to television, refrigerators, coolers/fans, android mobile phones, and sometimes laptops and computers. In most of these houses, the television was positioned in one of two ways. In the first instance, the television stand faced the door, inviting neighbours passing the house to stop for a conversation about the show playing on the TV. Some other families placed their TV close to a window or the door. They stole a connection from the cables outside to get different channels for free.

Jhopadpatti, on the other hand, are house clusters consisting of makeshift huts, also called *kutcha* houses, and are built from less durable housing materials. In the Seemapuri area of Mumbai, many houses in the *jhopadpatti* were *kutcha* houses constructed from readily available and discarded materials. For example, the roofs of huts were made from tin, straw, plastic covers, and cardboard. The residents in the *jhopadpatti* settlements often did not have refrigerators or coolers and cooked their food on *chulas*—small mud or brick stoves.

People in the *chawls* seldom socialised or had alliances with the residents in the *jhopadpatti* areas. Families in the *chawls* followed various cultural protocols, gender roles, and social norms more ardently than those in the *jhopadpatti*. Social prestige, respectability, support of the community, and efforts for upward mobility through education were some of the commonly used phrases in the *chawls* reflecting the values dominant among the residents. The *chawls* were surrounded by more commercial outlets such as retail shops, restaurants, small business offices, and Internet cafes. *Jhopadpatti*, on the other hand, were often labelled unsafe and dirty, and many *chawl* residents believed that people from the *jhopadpatti* settlements were criminals, drunkards, prostitutes, and thieves. While *chawls* and *jhopadpatti* were a part of the slum settlement, people from the *chawls* refused to identify their residences as slums. Their *chawls* were cramped, they experienced a shortage of water supply, the sanitation facilities were not optimum, and the public service roads in the areas were dilapidated. Even so, they insisted that their residence was an upgrade from the *jhopadpatti* nearby.

Ownership of technological products was a significant marker of distinction between the residents of the *chawls* and *jhopadpatti*. According to the

residents of *chawls*, smartphones were a status symbol. Owning smartphones meant the user could read, was tech-savvy, and had the financial resources to buy technologies. Residents from the *jhopadpatti* settlements also had phones, but those were not smartphones. "They do not need smartphones" is what the *chawl* residents believed. People living in *jhopadpatti* could seldom read or write. Most young people, including children aged 12 to 17, could not afford to attend school because many had to work regular hours (40 hours a week at least) at a young age to support their families. The children worked as washermen, domestic helpers, delivery persons, or shop assistants. Smartphones were a literate person's device, the *chawl* residents often emphasised.

Class, caste, and religious identities limited the inter-group interactions among residents of these two kinds of settlements. The *chawls* generally comprised salaried/service-class families with low incomes. Often, a single *chawl* housed residents from the same religious community—either Hindus or Muslims. On the other hand, though the *jhopadpatti* areas witnessed clusters of huts occupied by the same religious communities, the segregation was not well-defined. All the houses were largely cramped together for lack of space. The *jhopadpatti* settlements had a considerable residential population working in low-paying and highly exploitative jobs; they worked as migrant labourers, rag pickers, sanitation workers, and domestic helpers. The *chawl* residents identified themselves as higher-class citizens—responsible and hard-working. They often had a more stable income source than the residents of the *jhopadpatti*, who were primarily employed in the informal sectors of the economy. Also, *jhopadpatti* residents were criminalised and underserved by both public and the police.

My second site was Seemapuri in Delhi. It housed migrants from surrounding states, especially Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Punjab, and countries like Bangladesh, Nepal, and Myanmar. The *kutcha* houses were the residue of the constant flux of residents to the city as people continued to migrate to Delhi for jobs, better livelihoods, and education for their children. Seemapuri does not obey the guidelines of planned-city development programmes and goals. It can be called an urban sprawl within the city. It has witnessed the rapid growth of residents due to the migration of Information & Technology (IT) professionals and workers in the informal sectors of the economy. Therefore, Delhi has witnessed the rapid construction of makeshift huts and other brick-and-mortar residences over sewage lines, under flyovers and bridges, and running through random clusters of commercial complexes among large swathes of underserved settlements. The government defines this process as the illegal encroachment of public property/lands. The

municipality sometimes pulled down parts of these houses and displaced the residents. Government officials visited areas in Seemapuri to inspect illegal encroachment, handing over notices with deadlines demanding the residents evacuate. On several occasions, the municipality also demolished parts of these illegal constructions.

Television and mobile phones were standard in the households of Seemapuri. As soon as the family could afford it, the first technology they purchased was often a television set. Meanwhile, residents used alternative ways of gaining access to other digital technologies. The most common method used was collective ownership of technologies. Collective ownership of technologies did not mean that all the members who own the technology share the costs incurred. Collective ownership means some families could afford to buy these technologies and then agree to share them with their neighbours and other residents. If a Seemapuri resident did not have a mobile phone and was required to share their contact number to fill out a form and application or apply for jobs and admissions, they provided the contact number of their neighbours/family members who owned mobile phones.

Since 2016, this practice of collective ownership has become less common. In 2016, many residents had mobile phones, even if they could not regularly recharge their phones with outgoing calls or Internet data packages. Most service providers in the neighbourhood, such as Reliance Jio, Vodafone, BSNL, and others, started offering free incoming calls and messages to all subscribers on the condition that they would maintain a minimum talk time balance on their phones.

For many residents of Seemapuri, mobile phones soon became quotidian. They used them for basic communication needs and entertainment purposes. The functions assigned to mobile phones were seldom related to work, education, and development. The residents sometimes used phones to apply for government schemes or jobs and submit different types of online applications. Still, they would spend much of their Internet data package and phone battery on social media—socialising with their friends and relatives online, watching and making TikToks (before the Indian government banned the app). They would follow celebrities and Bollywood gossip on Instagram. While evaluating the cost of owning a mobile phone, the residents also calculated the electricity required to charge the phones. Some women, labelled "stingy" by their neighbours, often tried to charge their phones' batteries at their friends' homes while hanging out with their peer group in the evening. The residents never blatantly refused such requests from their friends, asking if they could charge their phones while visiting them, but they had created a long list of excuses they used to deny their request

indirectly. Nobody wanted to pay for electricity spent charging the phone batteries of their neighbours.

The children in the settlement devised dynamic ways of accessing digital technologies for entertainment and leisure. They used their parents' mobile phones, stole the Internet from others' Wi-Fi, or worked and saved money to buy personal phones and data packages. Some children called themselves brokers. They scavenged for lost and broken phones, got these repaired, and sold them to customers at a secondhand rate. In Seemapuri, children were not only using digital technologies but mediating and sustaining digital cultures.

My third site, Munnekollal, is located near Kariyammana Agrahara, one of Bangalore's many upcoming Information Technology (IT) clusters. Big corporate institutions such as Goldman Sachs, Sigma Soft Tech Park, the Horizon College of Engineering, Oracle India Pvt Limited, and many luxury hotels such as Novotel and Courtyard by Marriott surround Kariyammana Agrahara. The low-income residential area of Munnekollal is classified as a slum settlement, housing hundreds of migrant workers from West Bengal, northern districts of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and some northeastern states, especially Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The emergence of IT clusters in Bangalore has created a distinct residency pattern in these areas. IT clusters attract the highly educated young population from across the country, and these IT professionals continue to migrate to the city in large numbers. The young IT employees work long hours in their corporate jobs, spend time commuting through congested traffic conditions and raise their families in the city. Young professionals extensively rely on the informal sector for cheap labour to manage their households. From guards, liftmen, cooks, and cleaners to nannies and pet caretakers, the young upper-middle-class buys the cheap labour of migrant workers to keep up with their professional commitments and family responsibilities. After working for ten hours in upper-middle-class residential buildings of Whitefield and other surrounding areas, the workers return to their overcrowded and make-shift homes.

Ensconced in the technological ebbs and flows generated in the IT clusters around, many migrant workers had easy access to mobile phones, televisions, and laptops/computers. Access, however, did not always imply ownership in this situation. Many workers employed as domestic helpers used the technologies in their employers' homes. Sometimes, the employers provided the workers with mobile phones to ensure they did their jobs effectively.

The slum settlement of Munnekollal is like any other low-income residential area in major cities of the country. The households lack sanitation

facilities, clean drinking water, ventilation, public transport, and access roads and lanes. The slum settlement in Munnekollal is a microcosm of its own, detached from the workings of technologically advanced corporate offices and upper- and middle-income homes at the centre of the IT clusters. The slum settlement was on the margins defining the boundaries of these IT clusters, often forgotten in the social and civic plans designed to serve the city's population.

Though some slum residents in Munnekollal emphasised that the city provided ample opportunities to create a better life than they had in their hometowns and villages, many of them also repeatedly narrated their struggles of traversing through a city built for the already well-off and privileged sections of the society. They worked hard to fulfil their aspirations—saved money and bought a TV for their kids and a refrigerator for the family.

They projected an aspirational middle-class image to showcase that they could adapt to the middle-class requirements. Many domestic workers were excited to own mobile phones, create a WhatsApp account, and share their social media profiles and contact details with their employers. They also believed that owning digital technologies gave them access to middle-class communities and employment opportunities.

Navigating these sites, I gathered narratives exploring children's engagement with digital technologies. These narratives contain conceptualisations of social identities, complicated vignettes of lived realities, and debates about reductionist systems of knowledge often used to examine children's digital experiences in poor contexts of the global South.

Children in these slums did not want to spend their limited data packages and mobile battery life on education, learning, and other neoliberal goals for self-empowerment and development. Instead, their motivation was to fulfil their desires of nurturing romance, enacting glamour, experiencing luxury, creating aspired and alternative online identities, and fostering community bonds to access social rewards and experience a sense of security. Aspirations for socioeconomic and cultural mobility underlined poor children's digital engagements. As they prioritised their aspirations and desires, they repurposed these technologies and ascribed new meanings to them. They developed novel strategies to negotiate the resource and sociocultural constraints they faced and continued accessing and inhabiting digital spaces and networks. Understanding children's negotiated digital engagements required that I situate them within a broader assemblage of social identities, the dominant cultural norms, and existing structures of power in resource-constrained and culturally nuanced sites of the urban slums.

An Ethnography of Children's Digital Lives

This book provides rich stories of the digital lives of 62 children as they engage with their parents, family members, teachers, and other community members in the urban slums. I used participant observation to document the digital media use of children and their families. I hung out with them in their homes, schools, neighbourhoods, and public places like roads and festival sites. I also conducted social media ethnography—following children and their parents on their social media profiles and observing their online activities (posts, comments, likes/reactions, friend lists, and conversations) on Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube. I explored how children used their social media profiles to circumvent and reinforce the social norms they inhabited. It also allowed me to study how their transcultural and global interactions online influenced their lived experiences in local and offline contexts. The stories children shared on how they access digital technologies, what they do online, and how they feel about their online/digital encounters guided my thinking about gender dynamics, religious identities, and caste and class realities in the lives of children.

To write an ethnography of poor children's digital engagements in urban slums, who experience marginalisation every day, I actively engaged with issues of representation at a theoretical and methodological level. I relied on the theoretical principles of critical ethnography to attend to the role of ideology and the influence of the existing power relations on human interactions. As Thomas argues, "Critical ethnography emerges when members of a culture of ethnography become reflective and ask not only "What is this?" but also "What could this be?" (1993, p. 5). The origins of this methodological approach go back to the critical theory of Marxism and the scholarship emerging from the Frankfurt School of critical theory. When critical theory informs ethnographic methods and practices, scholars are encouraged to attend to the role of ideology and the influence of the existing power relations on human interactions in the field.

Therefore, a defining feature of my ethnographic endeavour is its reliance on critical theories. In starting from a theory-laden position, my work challenges the rejection of theory in favour of an essentially grounded approach undertaken in interpretive and naturalistic ethnography. As Masemann explains (1982, p. 1), "Critical ethnography refers to studies which use a basically anthropological, qualitative, participant-observer methodology but which rely for their theoretical formulation on a body of theory deriving from critical sociology and philosophy." In critical ethnography, the ethnographer

is tasked with realising the connections between micro realities and the macro structures of power dominant in the ethnographic sites.

Building on the traditions of critical theory, my ethnographic narratives in the book intentionally denaturalise the taken-for-granted assumptions about poor children's digital engagements by unpacking how normalisation reinforces the existing power hierarchies and status quo (Madison, 2005). To resist normalisation (Denzin, 2001; Noblit et al., 2004), I used resources, skills, and opportunities to defend and preserve the voices and stories of those who are often silenced. This task of representing the Other has been heavily criticised, especially when the ethnographer occupies a higher position in the power relations with the participants and communities. A representation authored by the privileged scholar about vulnerable and historically marginalised participants always runs the risk of colonising the Other even more through misrepresentations and sweeping generalisations (Minh-ha, 1992). An ethnographer's gaze can cement power hierarchies instead of interrupting systems of discrimination and marginalisation (Mani, 1998; Mohanty, 1984). I acknowledge these critiques; I actively used them to shape my ethnographic practices throughout the research process. Building on Shuman's (2005) discussion of an ethnography of the marginalised, I argue that even if representing the Other is a task fraught with ethical dilemmas, scholars should engage with those who have faced unprecedented discrimination. Engaging with the marginalised can help the ethnographer privilege subject- and community-centred insights and experiences in her scholarship. My ethnographic practices also drew inspiration from the journalistic work of Katherine Boo in the slums of Annawadi in Bombay, India. In her book *Behind the Beautiful Forevers* (2012), she explains, "When I settle into a place, listening and watching, I don't try to fool myself that the stories of individuals are themselves arguments. I believe that better arguments, maybe even better policies, get formulated when we know more about ordinary lives" (Boo, 2012, p. 202). The critical construction of better representations and more ethical and participatory stories of the Other begins with acknowledging the major critiques about representing the Other. We should develop rigorous methods and practices to understand and empathise with the profoundly complex realities of vulnerable groups.

My identity as a middle-income, educated, and Hindu ethnographer in the field invoked the most significant question essential to designing ethical practices of critical ethnography—the question of positionality. As Noblit et al. (2004) insist: "Critical ethnographers must explicitly consider how their acts of studying and representing people and situations are acts

of domination even as critical ethnographers reveal the same in what they study" (p. 3).

Engaging with the positionality of the researcher is sometimes called a "reflexive turn" in ethnography. It involves examining our roles, interactions, power positions, and other embodied actions as ethnographers in the field and appreciating how our positionality influences our relations with the site and the participants. Immersion in the field and the participants' lives and communities is a personal and subjective experience. As an ethnographer, I must account for my subjectivity and political and social identities. Throughout the book, I have tried to provide a transparent and detailed record of my positionality to ensure that the readers can evaluate how and to what extent my subjectivity influenced and affected the fieldwork and the analysis. The process of revealing my positionality began with acknowledging that I bring my personal experiences, motivations, politics, and understandings to the field. The assemblage of the multiple subjective positions I inhabit defined and limited the intellectual, analytical, and interactional techniques and situations I could deploy to make sense of the sites and participants. As Aimee Carrilo Rowe explains, "We are always inseparable from the theory we create. And the theory we create allows us to live in new and more just ways. Our homework is to examine these connections—between self and community, community and theory, between theory and justice" (Rowe, 2005, p. 17).

My ethnography of children's digital lives engages the power imbalances in slum settlements and children's routines, responds to the critiques of representing the Other, and provides a transparent account of the strategies used to navigate the fault lines inherent in writing about marginalised peoples. Even though I felt a sense of compassion toward children, I do not romanticise their choices, life experiences, or engagements with digital technologies. My goal is to provide accounts of their digital engagements which reflect the diverse facets of their humanity—their performative compliance with systems of gender, class, caste, and religious discrimination, instantaneous acts of resistance for personal gains, their practices of surveilling others, and how and why they evaluated other people's actions and conduct. Though I acknowledge the different levels at which they were vulnerable because of their social identities and economic conditions, I have not engaged with children as unique or different. In analysing their lived realities, I have used all the intellectual and analytical resources available to examine the lives of adults. Even then, narratives of children's digital engagements provided in this book are only "partial truths and understandings" (Ong, 1999, p. 116). In providing partial approximations of children's

digital engagements, I critique the dominance of strong theories—theories designed to provide generalisations instead of distinct narratives resistant to dominant discourses on children's engagement with digital technologies in countries of the global South. The guiding philosophy of this ethnography is to empathise with complex social identities and lives and demystify beliefs, assumptions, and theories seeking simplifications through generalisations.

The children I worked with are not representative of the multitudes of class, gender, caste, and religious realities in the urban low-income contexts of India. I do not claim to provide insights that can be translated into generalisable theories and conclusions. Engaging with meta-theories of children's digital engagements has often made me feel uncomfortable, mainly because these theories use neo-liberal motivations and a language of rights and agency to universalise the lived realities of children from poor neighbourhoods and contexts. Though these issues are significant in building and enhancing children's access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), it is not easy to hear children's felt experiences in these narrations. This book partly emerged to address my discomfort with how children's lives and digital engagements have been documented.

I have prioritised the different ways children make sense of and engage with digital technologies from within the broader socio-cultural realities they inhabit. Following this, my book addresses three overarching questions. First: how do the dominant sociocultural norms and identities in India (gender-religion-caste-class) influence the way children use and ascribe meaning to digital media technologies? Second: How do children challenge, circumvent, and reinforce the dominant norms in their use of digital media? Third: What can we learn about the digital experiences of poor people in burgeoning markets of the global South?

The book begins with examining the Digital India initiative rolled out by the Government of India (GOI), unveiling the collusion between state and technology companies. The execution and proliferation of the Digital India programme in the slums of Azad Nagar, Munnekolala, and Seemapur highlight the ubiquity of the development and empowerment paradigm/discourse at the heart of projects designed for poor and marginalised communities. The Digital India initiative serves as a placeholder for understanding the different processes, mentalities, and actions that compel poor children to marshal their digital practices and aspirations to sustain the myth of a digitally empowered neoliberal subject. The chapter concludes with an ethnographic story reflecting that children's social identities, namely gender, class, religion, and caste, determine their situatedness within power hierarchies in their communities and shape their digital experiences. Though the intersecting

axes of differentiation along the lines of social identities and norms bleed
into each other constantly, I use three social identities, namely gender, caste,
and religion, as the main thematic categories to structure my narrative
in this book. Each chapter focuses on fleshing out the intersection of one
social identity (gender, religion, and caste) with children's class realities and
digital experiences. Accordingly, children's class locations are an analytical
constant in this book.

In Chapter 2, I document how children's gender identities and norms
inform their digital engagements. Children used negotiation strategies to
navigate gender-based norms, and the constraints they faced when engaging
with digital technologies. Gender norms in their low-income neighbourhoods
influenced children's online participation and the meanings they ascribed
to digital technologies. I trace the two negotiation strategies children used
to challenge, reinforce, or circumvent the gender constraints imposed on
their digital access and use: 1) negotiation strategies to experience and
produce glamour and 2) negotiation strategies to enact and ensure privacy.

Within the first strategy, I argue that children perceived digital technolo-
gies as channels to fulfil their aspirations of upward class mobility. They
believed digital technologies could allow them to experience lifestyles and
realities beyond their material reach and class locations. Though these ex-
periences were often limited to virtual spaces, conversations, and networks,
children strived to design strategies to translate their online experiences
into material opportunities for class mobility. These negotiation strategies
aimed to harness the glamour of digital technologies for class mobility.
The glamour of digital technologies lies in their potential to convince poor
children that they can achieve upward class mobility through technology.
To understand the glamour of digital technologies, I examined the strategies
of negotiations children used to sell, manipulate, seduce, and deceive others
into believing the desired/aspired identity they created online. Children
used two negotiation strategies to experience upward class mobility and
glamour: a) they cultivated transnational relationships and aspirational
online identities, and b) they strived to deploy their online networks to
access material resources.

Following this, I dive into unpacking another digital issue relevant to
the intersection of children's gender identities and norms and their digital
experiences, i.e., privacy. I complicate the dominant understanding of
digital users' right to privacy by demonstrating that privacy is a gendered,
classed, and culturally distinct concept and experience. Poor children's
definition and practice of privacy bore witness to the influence of patriarchy
and misogyny dominant in their communities. Poor children identified

social media and other digital technologies as *confessional*. I use gender as an analytical lens to elaborate on the confessional nature of digital technologies and the different negotiation strategies children designed to monitor and regulate their engagement with perceivably public platforms of communication such as social media. The conclusion of this chapter emphasises why and how I prioritise the explanations children offered to describe their understanding of the concept of glamour and privacy, thus delimiting discussions around issues of autonomy, surveillance, and public participation in children's digital engagements.

Chapter 3 presents ethnographic narratives highlighting how poor children's digital engagements embed their caste identities and norms. Caste is a socio-historical system of discrimination in India and influences several aspects of children's everyday lives. I submit three main arguments exploring the interconnections between caste, class, and digital technologies. First, children's experience with caste-based discrimination informs their quotidian digital practices—how they present themselves online, how they use social media, for what purposes, and why and when they choose to be silent or invisible. Second, macro power structures sustaining caste-based discrimination in society inform how poor children from Dalit-Bahujan households enact *jugaad*, negotiate with caste norms, and cultivate online networks and practices. Third, I revisit and debunk the neoliberal idea of development based on the assumption that access to new technologies will help Dalit-Bahujan children to overcome caste-based inequities and historical systems of discrimination. Children used a multi-modal and non-resistive approach (evident in their leisure activities, networking preferences, and representational and communication styles) to conceal their caste identity and avoid discrimination online. The conclusion expounds that the strategies of negotiation children used in their digital encounters to engage with their caste identities reflect the scope of *jugaad* as a self-designed tactical approach to navigating constraints.

Chapter 4 documents how Hindu and Muslim children in Azad Nagar, Munnekolala, and Seemapuri enacted their religious identities online and offline. Poor children used digital technologies as *proxy sites* for enacting their religious identities. Enactments on digital platforms seldom translated into children performing their digitally mediated religious ideas and practices in physical spaces. The children were not compelled to perform these digitally mediated religious identities in material contexts, so they were more imaginative and violent in their online enactments. Using digital technologies as proxy sites to imagine ideal enactments of their religious identities was also influenced by children's desire to experience a sense

of belongingness with their community. The chapter offers ethnographic narratives demonstrating that the globalising potential of digital technologies induced anxiety among children as they felt that their local identities and cultural beliefs were collapsing under the weight of Western ideas and lifestyles. They actively used online platforms and communication channels to reinforce their religious identities and allegiances, thus deepening the existing communal differences.

The stories in this chapter describe how children practised *jugaad*—they simultaneously complied with and subtly resisted norms and sentiments dominant in their religious communities. They chose to demonise the religious Other in closed and covert online spaces and continued collaborating and co-existing with the Other in material sites for economic and social benefits. Children purposely negotiated with the religious differences in their material sites of work and play because they realised that complying with the dominant script of communal coexistence allowed them to avail economic and social benefits. Children practised *jugaad* because they used a combination of negotiation strategies to both reinforce and challenge/circumvent the religious norms dominant in their communities for personal desires, economic motivations, and other social benefits.

In the last chapter, I argue that popular narratives sometimes identify poor children as vulnerable groups who need help and protection to negotiate contemporary caste, class, gender, and religious inequities. Simultaneously, these children are labelled lazy deviants who use hard-won access to digital technologies for entertainment, socialising, and other non-productive purposes. This messiness in the popular narratives describing children's engagement with digital technologies in the three low-income urban settlements is convenient for governments, corporations, and the market-driven society. Such notional messiness allows the macro institutions of power in the country, i.e., the state, corporations, and society, to reduce poor children into a market segment driven by the neoliberal and profit logic. For instance, promoting the notion that access to digital technologies will enable poor children to exit poverty and acquire class mobility is instrumental in creating a demand for cheap, subpar, and accessible mobile phones among the country's largest and poorest socio-economic group of consumers, also called the bottom of the pyramid. Moreover, promoting digital technologies as an elixir to the daily socio-economic and cultural discrimination children experience effectively transfers the responsibility to initiate social change from the governments to vulnerable children. When increasing digital access among children does not improve their living conditions in the slums, children are

blamed for using their digital technologies for non-developmental purposes. The top-down fiction of children's digital engagements brackets them as persons with fixed aspirations and experiences and heralds a collapse of the full spectrum of poor children's humanity. In highlighting this, the book also provides a glimpse into the existing state of digital dystopia in the urban sprawls of India.

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