What is privilege?

Priyangee Guha

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Introduction

Through this module, we encourage efforts to deepen our understanding of our identity and explore nuances in what "identity" means, how we think about it, how it works in society, and how it affects our everyday life and interactions. Furthermore, it will help you understand how the multiple identities we carry in our everyday life impact how conveniently we get access to resources, and how easily we benefit from resources such as Wikipedia and its sister projects.

Before we start the module, please answer these questions:
[Note to learners and trainers: These questions are deeply personal in nature. If you feel uncomfortable revealing the answers or writing them down, answer them silently to yourself.]

What gender (or lack thereof) do you identify with?

Answer:

What was the gender assigned to you at birth?

Answer:

What religion, if any, do you follow?

Answer:

What caste, if any, do you belong to?

Answer:

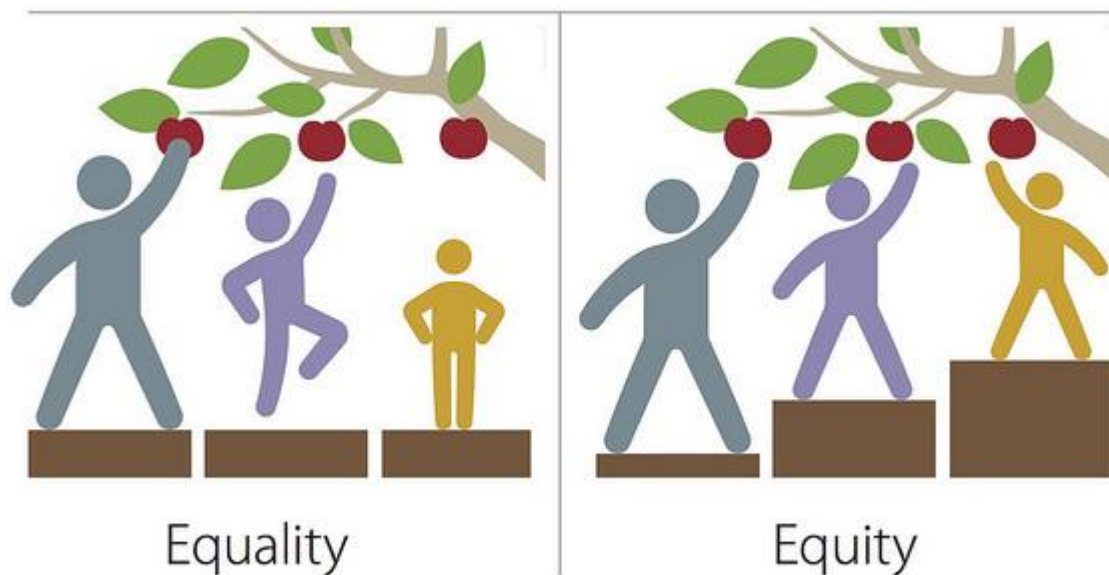How would you define your sexual orientation?

Answer:

What is your primary language of communication?

Answer:

Do you own a laptop or a personal computer?

Answer:

What is *privilege*?

Equality   Equity

Flickr/ MPCA Photos, CC BY-NC 2.0 (https://www.flickr.com/photos/mpcaphotos/31655988501)
Image description: In the picture on the left, three people of different height have been given a foot stool of the same height and they are trying to pluck a fruit from the tree. This is equality. In the picture on the right, three people of different heights have been given a foot stool of different heights and they are trying to pluck a fruit from the tree. This is equity.

When we roll a dice, the probability of getting any number from 1 to 6 is one-sixth or 16.67%. Every number has an equal possibility of showing up. When we flip a coin, chances of either heads or tails are half or 50%. Don't we often wish every event in our lives had such equal chances? Then, in a job interview with 5 candidates, each would have 20% probability of getting selected irrespective of what they were wearing, the accent in which they spoke English, their place of origin, hometown, gender, *etc.* Yet, reality is very different. This is because we live in an unequal society. One way that women have it hard can be noted from the fact that it is still difficult for women to travel or venture out late at night without having to worry about sexual violence. This also has a bearing on women's choices in the job market both from the perspective of an employee and as an employer. For instance, according to a recent World bank study, Indian companies still prefer to employ men over women[1]. In comparison, men have it easy. In an ideal world, everybody should have the freedom to venture out of their house without any fear for their safety. However, men have been having it easy over a period of time just because they are men. This is a classic example of male privilege at work.

Sociologists define privilege as an **invisible** package of **unearned** benefits by particular groups that accumulate over a period of time based on their location within a social hierarchy. It is **unearned** because we often get it simply owing to the circumstance in which we were born. For instance, the quality of education we will have access to in our lifetime depends on our family, the socio-economic condition and the location where we are born. It will determine the social standing we have and the kind of opportunities we get in life. It is **invisible** because we are often unaware of its presence. Since it is something we have had since birth, we assume that it is normal and acceptable to have it. The nature of one's privilege can range from the caste, class, gender, sexual identity and orientation, religion, language, *etc.* one belongs to. These benefits are showered by the society without the privileged people *asking* for them. This video entitled *"Race of life"* illustrates this concept pretty well: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBQx8FmOT_0

The discussions pertaining to the idea of '*privilege*' were widely prevalent among many sociologists. However, the term gained currency in 1988 when academic Peggy Mcintosh published a seminal article - White privilege and male privilege - decoding white privilege and male privilege[2]. She used this opportunity to introspect her own identity and the privileges associated with it.

Case studies

Case study 1	Case study 2
Rakesh is an information technology (IT) professional. His father runs a construction company. Rakesh grew up in a neighbourhood	Ranjita lives in an unauthorised settlement in south Delhi. Her father is a daily wage earner, and her mother works as part-time domestic

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[1] Dipti Jain. (2018) Indian companies often prefer men over women in hiring: World Bank study. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from https://www.livemint.com/Industry/jRflIDbFXkNJH1itasp8xI/Indian-companies-often-prefer-men-over-women-in-hiring-Worl.html

[2] Mcintosh, P. (1988). White privilege and male privilege. *Privilege,* 28-40. doi:10.4324/9780429494802-6 Retreived from https://www.nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/White_Privilege_and_Male_Privilege_Personal_Account-Peggy_McIntosh.pdf [PDF]

in south Delhi. As a Brahmin by caste, Rakesh's father believes that education is very important for a person's growth and future. Rakesh went to a private school in Delhi. He also had a computer and an internet connection at home. Rakesh was good at computer science, so his teachers and family encouraged him to participate in various activities related to the subject. During his summer holidays, Rakesh's father would enrol him into summer schools in India and abroad. Rakesh graduated with an engineering degree and then got a master's degree. Rakesh spends his free time volunteering for projects he cares about. Rakesh's family is very proud of his achievements, and appreciates him for all his hard work.	help at the residence of a renowned entrepreneur. They are of a lower caste, and do not own any land holdings. Ranjita studied at a government-run school for girls. One day, an NGO visited her school, and introduced her to the world of computer science programming. She felt very excited, and was interested in learning more about it. With the limited resources Ranjita had, she visited the "community library and computer centre" where she lived, and taught herself one computer language. However, after she completed high school, her family discouraged her by saying that courses and jobs in computer science are for boys. Ranjita also felt that she should work and supplement the meagre family income, although her parents did not explicitly ask her to do so. She tried to find a job where she could put her computer skills to use. However, as she had no formal education beyond high school, candidates who had higher qualifications were chosen over her. Like her mother, Ranjita now works as a domestic help in a few homes. She works 12 to 14 hours a day to make ends meet. She still hopes to pursue her dream of getting an IT job, but she finds herself too sapped of energy, time and money to update and sharpen her existing skills, or to study a formal course.
Do you think Rakesh has any dis/advantage because of his identity? If yes, what aspect of his identity do you think accelerated/ hampered his professional growth?	Do you think Ranjita had any dis/advantage because of her identity? If yes, what aspect of her identity do you think accelerated/hampered her professional growth? How is her story different from Rakesh's?

To better understand the concept of privilege, do check out this episode entitled "On A Plate" from the comic The Pencilsword by Toby Morris that looks at the life trajectories of Richard and Paula, which comes to be determined by the social and economic backgrounds they come from.

Points to Ponder
1. Think about the different identities you have. (Refer to the list of questions you answered at the beginning of this module.)
2. Make a list of identities that you think put you at an advantage, and those that you think put you at a disadvantage.

[Note to learners and trainers: This exercise involves questions that are deeply

personal in nature. If you are uncomfortable doing it in a peer-group, you may reflect on this exercise and do it in private.]

Activity

Make a list of things that you think one needs in order to effectively contribute to Wikimedia projects.

1. Which of those mentioned in the list do you have access to?
2. Which of those mentioned in the list do you think are accessible to **everyone, everywhere**?
3. What happens when one does not have access to the resource(s) you listed? Explain using examples.

Intersectionality

In the previous section, we studied how we sometimes have access to various resources simply because of our identities at birth. But at any point in time, we have multiple identities. When someone asks about our identity, our answer will vary depending on the situation. When we are about to enter a bar, we will mention our age. When we enter a religious place, we will mention our religion. When we go for a professional meeting, we will mention our profession and designation. When using a dating website, we will mention our gender and sexual orientation and preferences.
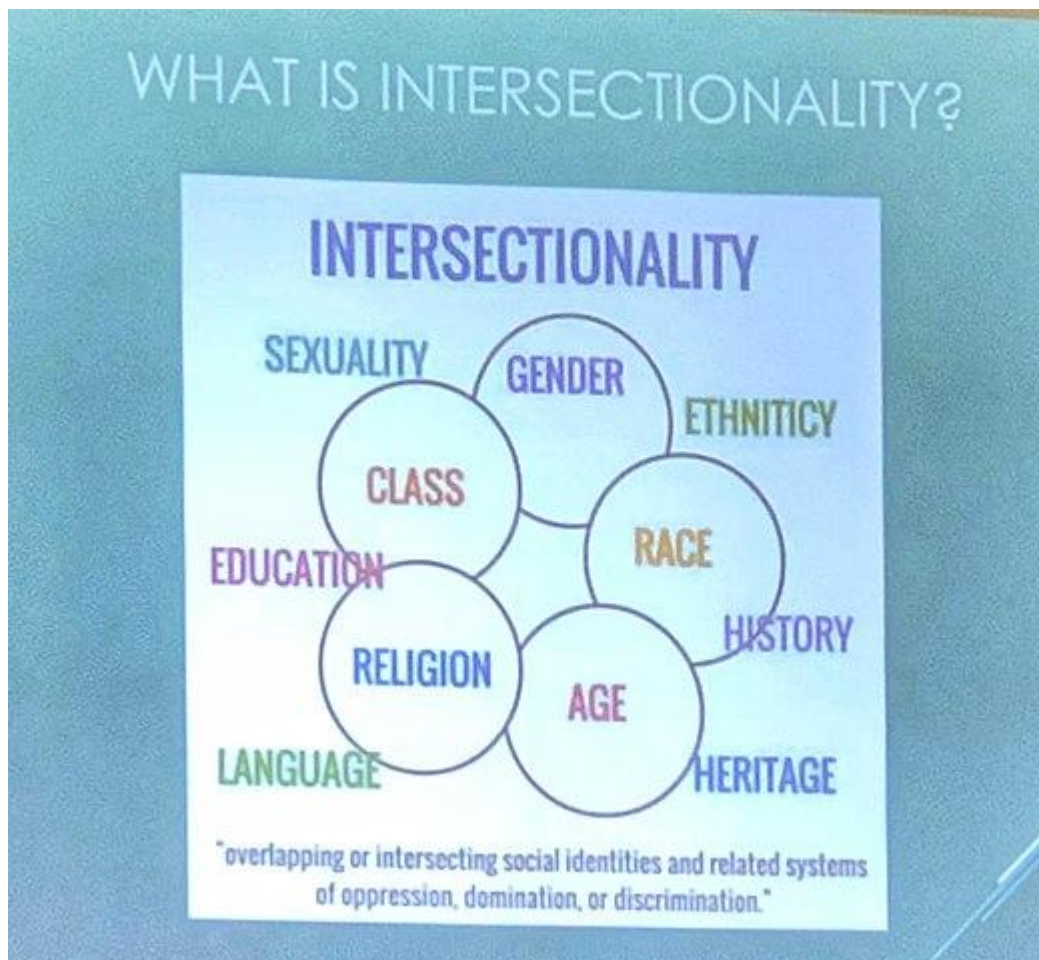
Wikimedia Commons/ DTankersley (WMF), CC BY-SA 4.0. Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Intersectionality_diagram_(from_a_slide_deck_presented_by_Russell_Robinson)_at_All_Hands,_January_2018.jpg

Depending on the identity and the context, the level of a person's vulnerability or privilege also varies. The more layers of *under-privileged* identity one carries, greater is the vulnerability. For instance, a homeless person on the street is at greater risk of being subjected to street-based crime than someone who has a home. If the homeless person is a woman, the chances of her being subjected to sexual violence are also higher. If she is a trans woman, she may fear being harassed by public officials as well. If she is also disabled, she is at far greater risk. Thus, with each layer of vulnerability, a person's chance of being oppressed increases. Hence, it is important to view a person's identity holistically. This is called *intersectionality*.

Let's look at another example. In case studies above, we saw how Rakesh and Ranjita both live in south Delhi. However, there are several differences in their lives:
Class: Rakesh belongs to an affluent family of entrepreneurs, Ranjita to a family of low-wage workers.
Caste: Rakesh hails from an upper caste, Ranjita belongs to a lower caste.
Gender: Rakesh is a man, and Ranjita is a woman.
Despite living in the same city and the same neighbourhood, Rakesh and Ranjita's access to resources vary because of the circumstances in which they were born. For example, Rakesh has two professional degrees; Ranjita has completed high school.

Now, let us imagine a story similar to Ranjita's, in which she is a Brahmin from a family of a lower economic class. When we compare Rakesh's and Ranjita's story, both Brahmins, we will realise that even though both have privilege of their caste, Ranjita will face the following disadvantages:
Class: Rakesh belongs to an affluent family of entrepreneurs, Ranjita to a family of low-wage workers.
Gender: Rakesh is a man, and Ranjita is a woman.

Twitter/ Nathan W Pyle
https://twitter.com/nathanwpyle/status/999294987195035649?lang=en

Let us take another scenario. Let us imagine a story similar to Rakesh's where our protagonist is a woman, Sonam. When we compare Sonam's and Ranjita's stories, both women, even while being subjected to similar gender-based prejudices, they will have the following differences:

Class: Sonam belongs to an affluent family of entrepreneurs, Ranjita to a family of low-wage workers.

Caste: Sonam is an upper caste woman, and Ranjita is of a lower caste.

These differences, which are totally outside the control and sphere of influence of Rakesh, Sonam and Ranjita, will determine which one of them gets access to resources and the quantity of resources at their disposal. This will also determine how they experience life in general. Hence, no two people will ever have the same life experience. For instance, you may believe that every child should have equal access to education. But Sonam may go to a private school with several amenities that make the learning experience rewarding and enjoyable for her. Ranjita to an under-resourced local municipal school. And we all know that the quality of education differs in both these circumstances, which in turn, has an impact on the future prospects of the children who read there.

Wikimedia Commons/ Su--May, CC-BY 2.0

Likewise, when we talk about privilege, we cannot discuss privilege of only one identity at a time. This is because we live our multiple identities simultaneously. For instance, when we talk about rights of queer people, we cannot ignore the fact that a Dalit queer person will face more challenges than a Brahmin queer person. This issue was especially highlighted in Pune's Pride March of 2017 where the organisers came up with the rule *"No slogans on religion, caste, political parties, politicians, leaders, Supreme Court will be allowed".[3]* This is a classic example of how we choose to exclude the experiences of people because of the intersection of various identities they carry without choice. When one aspect of identity becomes the focus while others are excluded, full inclusion will not be achieved. In our third scenario above, if we have to advocate for Ranjita's rights, we need to bear in mind all her identities that holistically define her. She belongs to a lower caste, a woman, and from a low income family, and that she is at the intersection of all three identities, and more.

In the previous section, we watched the video entitled *"Race of Life"*. This video clearly describes the meaning and implication of intersectionality. In the next section we will discuss how identity, privilege and intersectionality are relevant in the context of the open knowledge movement.

Allyship

We are a part of a society that is built on multiple inequalities, which severely dis-privileges one group of people at the cost of others. Can a privileged person give up or surrender their privilege? No! It is socially conferred, whether or not we wish for it. It is not something that can be detached from one's identity. However, a privileged person

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[3] Singh, S. (2017, June 09). Whose Pride is it Anyways? Beyond the Hashtag Wars, Pune Pride Raises Important Questions We Need To Answer. Retrieved from
http://www.gaylaxymag.com/blogs/whose-pride-anyways-beyond-hashtag-wars-pune-pride-raises-important-questions-need-answer

can always try to be a *good ally.*

Empathy

"Let me hold the door for you.
I may have never walked in your shoes,
but I can see your soles are worn,
your strength is torn under the weight of a story I have never lived before.
Let me hold the door for you.
After all you've walked through,
It's the least I can do."

Morgan Harper Nichols

What does this mean? A good ally does much more than just believe in equality. As an ally, you acknowledge your position of privilege and oppression, and you want to change this pattern. You are willing to listen to people when they point out your biases, and you commit to making efforts to not repeat the same behaviour. You also promise to give the platform to those who do not have the privileges you have, and give them a chance to voice their own life stories and experiences.

Why do we need allies? We need allies because we want to ensure social justice for all. In other words, as allies we need to fight for equal rights for all, and for fair distribution of resources. Martin Luther King Jr. explains why we should fight for equal rights, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly." Popular Black writer-academic Roxane Gay says in her book 'Bad Feminist': "If we turn away and ignore injustice, it will indirectly foster inequality in the world. All too often, when we see injustices, both great and small, we think, That's terrible, but we do nothing. We say nothing. We let other people fight their own battles. We remain silent because silence is easier.' Qui tacet consentire videtur' is Latin for 'Silence gives consent.' When we say nothing, when we do nothing, we are consenting to these trespasses against us."

In order to be a good ally and to facilitate changing the *status quo*, the first step involves learning about and understanding our own privileges. It is only then that one can work towards an equitable society. We have to identify and acknowledge our privilege. This is not easy because it is usually *invisible* to the person at the receiving end of advantages of privilege. Where we have privilege, we tend to assume it is acceptable and normal. Hence, when someone without that same privilege calls attention to our unearned advantage, we may get defensive, and may fail to acknowledge our own privilege.

One way to learn how to identify and acknowledge privilege is by listening empathetically to the stories of people who do not share our privileges. It is also important to do so without judging people or their circumstances. Empathy is defined as the ability *"to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy, and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain thereto as if one were the other person, but without ever losing the 'as if' condition".*[4] Now, while listening to

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[4] Lucette B. Comer and Tanya Drollinge, Active Empathetic Listening and Selling Success: A Conceptual Framework, The Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Winter, 1999), pp.

people's struggle in manoeuvring the system without privilege, because you have not faced a similar struggle, you may notice that some part of you becomes dismissive of their experience. Instead, actively seek to accept that different people's experience will vary depending on various identities we carry, and each and every story is valid.

The Story of the Fox and the Crane[5]

(Equal treatment does not mean the same treatment)

The Fox invited the Crane to dinner. He served the food on a large flat dish. The Crane with her long narrow beak could not eat.

The Crane invited the Fox to dinner. She served the food in a deep vase, and so the Fox with his short, wide face could not eat.

Both friends had an equal opportunity for nourishment, but each time one of them could not take advantage of this opportunity.

This development challenge in every case is to identify barriers to the opportunities that exist and custom design the adjusted interventions that will lead to equality of outcome.

How is this relevant for *Wikipedians*?

"Imagine a world in which every single person on the planet is given free access to the sum of all human knowledge. That's what we are doing." - Jimmy Wales

Wikipedia's page about itself defines it as a "multilingual, web-based, free-content encyclopaedia project supported by the Wikimedia Foundation and based on a model of openly editable content".[6] Wikipedia aims to make knowledge accessible to all – both as contributors and as consumers. India, with its size and diversity of several kinds[7], still lacks the kind of coverage that more developed countries do on Wikipedia or its sister projects. The coverage that exists may not compass all of our country's rich diversity and depth. Sometimes, the narrative that does exist may not be written from our point of view, using our voice. Understanding the relationship between the narrative and the narrator is important in order to be truly inclusive.

In general, we have consistently seen that the average Wikipedia contributor is a white, English-speaking cisgendered man. The vast majority of content on Wikipedia written about most African countries is written by (primarily male) editors in Europe or North America[8]. Similarly, pre-dominance of men on the platform has meant that Wikipedia

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15-29. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40471703

[5] Undp.org. (2001). Gender In Development Programme Learning and Information pack. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from
http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/gender/Institutional%20Development/TLGEN1.6%20UNDP%20GenderAnalysis%20toolkit.pdf [PDF]

[6] En.wikipedia.org. About. Retrieved February 15, 2019 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:About

[7] Frederick Noronha. (2016) 'India at top of Wikipedia's priorities'. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
http://www.freepressjournal.in/world/india-at-top-of-wikipedias-priorities/906924

[8] Dimitra Kessenides and Max Chafkin. (2016) How Woke Is Wikipedia's Editorial Pool? - Bloomberg. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from

suffers from a gender gap, which is a widely documented problem. Women are under-represented on Wikipedia. Is the situation any different in India? Let's find out!

According to a report released in 2017, 59% of internet users in urban areas and 64% internet users in rural areas are men.[9] The ratio is even more skewed on Wikipedia. For instance, according to the 2011 survey for every 100 Wikipedia editors, only 9 percent are women.[10] [11] How is that important? We will answer this question with the help of two Wikipedia pages of two public figures in India. India has two international cricket teams – men's and women's. Virat Kohli is the captain of the Indian men's cricket team, while Mithila Raj is the captain of Indian women's cricket team. When we look at their respective Wikipedia pages[12], it is very obvious that the page of the former has much more information, references and photos and is better documented in general than the latter's. It is interesting to note that Mithila Raj made her debut much before Virat Kohli, yet the content in her page is much less detailed than that of Virat Kohli. The situation is worse for trans persons. For instance, let's look at the page of A. Revathi, a revolutionary writer and activist who wrote a book on her life[13]. Her page barely has any information about her, and is tagged as "needs additional citations" by "reliable sources". This phenomenon has not escaped the attention of the founder of Wikipedia, Jimmy Wales. He acknowledges that the biographies of famous women are inadequate.[14]

What about other identities such as language, caste and sexuality? Let's look at them one at a time. We know that India has 22 official languages. There are about 19,500 dialects in India![15] Most articles are written in English, and Wikipedia represents 24 Indian languages[16], of which the oldest turned 16 this year [June 2018].[17] This pattern in representation of languages clearly demonstrates inequity. As far as caste is concerned, we have all seen what happened to the page on *Bhanwari Devi.*[18] Bhanwari Devi is a

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https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2016-12-22/how-woke-is-wikipedia-s-editorial-pool

[9] Internet and Mobile Association of India and Kantar IMRB, Mobile Internet Report (2017). Retrieved February 20, 2019, from
https://cms.iamai.in/Content/ResearchPapers/2b08cce4-e571-4cfe-9f8b-86435a12ed17.pdf [PDF]

[10] Ting-Yi Chang. (2017) Preliminary research result on Wikipedia gender gap in India — The Centre for Internet and Society. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://cis-india.org/a2k/blogs/preliminary-research-result-on-wikipedia-gender-gap-in-india

[11] Douglas Scott. (2018) Why the theme for Wikimania 2018 will be "Bridging knowledge gaps—the Ubuntu way forward" – Wikimedia Blog. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://blog.wikimedia.org/2018/02/05/wikimania-cape-town-ubuntu

[12] Captain of Indian Cricket team: Men and women. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mithali_Raj and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virat_Kohli

[13] A. Revathi - Wikipedia. (2019) Retrieved February 15, 2019, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A._Revathi

[14] Kevin Rawlinson. (2011) Wikipedia seeks women to balance its 'geeky' editors | The Independent. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/gadgets-and-tech/news/wikipedia-seeks-women-to-balance-its-geeky-editors-2333605.html

[15] PTI. (2018, November 07). Census: More than 19,500 languages spoken in India as mother tongues. Retrieved February 15, 2019, from
https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/india/census-more-than-19500-languages-spoken-in-india-as-mother-tongues-1.2244791

[16] List of Indian language wiki projects - Wikimedia India Chapter. (n.d.) Retrieved from
http://wiki.wikimedia.in/List_of_Indian_language_wiki_projects

[17] Odia Wikipedia. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odia_Wikipedia

[18] Urvashi Sarkar. (2014) Wikipedia, Bhanwari Devi and the need for an alert feminist public| Kafila Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://kafila.online/2014/06/27/wikipedia-bhanwari-devi-and-the-need-for-an-alert-feminist-public-urvashi-

social worker from Rajasthan. She received the Neerja Bhanot Memorial Award in 1994, and she was invited to the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995. Her case led to the legislation of The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013. In 1992, Bhanwari Devi had accused upper-caste men of gang raping her in response to her efforts to fight child-marriage in her area. 27 years after the crime, her case is still in the courts as she waits for justice.[19] Until June 20, 2014, the Wikipedia page on Bhanwari Devi was full of incorrect information with incorrectly ascribed citations. Apart from incorrect information on process and protocols followed in the investigation, the page described Bhanwari Devi as a "young, illiterate potter woman", "village slut", "a professional prostitute who felt cheated by life and exploited by men" and described the accused as "poor; illiterate and knowing nothing about court procedures or media management". The entries in the page blatantly violated Wikipedia's content policies, and highlighted the need for feminist editors in the community.

Why are some topics grossly underrepresented? Well, mostly because of **_systemic bias_**.[20] There are measures being taken to ensure that such discrimination gaps are bridged. For example, Wikimedians and Wikimedia communities have been organising edit-a-thons with various groups in different parts of the world.[21] These editathons are explicitly designed to create a more inclusive environment for marginalised contributors and encourage creation of underrepresented content.[22] For instance, there are edit-a-thons for Indian Women in Science[23], women in art history[24], Dalit history[25], Black history[26] etc. While such efforts are helpful, it is helpful even during such events to keep a check on our inherent biases by asking ourselves:

> Do you only see people from similar backgrounds like you in your local Wikimedia community/ communities?
> Do you know where other Wikimedians in your country reside?
> How many Indian languages are represented?
> How many male and female Wikimedians do you know?

Thinking about these questions will be helpful because all these factors have a direct impact on how knowledge is produced and consumed by all of us. This is the first step in

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sarkar

[19] Nathan, A. (2018). Dalit woman's rape in '92 led to India's first sexual harassment law – but justice still eludes her. Retrieved from
https://scroll.in/article/899044/dalit-womans-rape-in-92-led-to-indias-first-sexual-harassment-law-but-justice-still-eludes-her

[20] Wikipedia:Systemic bias - Wikipedia. (n.d.) Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Systemic_bias

[21] Shrabonti Bagchi. (2016) Changing Wikipedia's (and society's) male bias is work in progress | FactorDaily. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://factordaily.com/wikipedia-male-bias-work-progress-india

[22] Talia Lavinmarch. (2016) A Feminist Edit-a-Thon Seeks to Reshape Wikipedia | The New Yorker. Retrieved February 1, 2019, from
https://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/a-feminist-edit-a-thon-seeks-to-reshape-wikipedia

[23] Indian Women in Science Wikipedia Edit-a-thon. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from
https://indiabioscience.org/meetings/indian-women-in-science-wikipedia-edit-a-thon

[24] Narrowing Gender Gap, Wikipedia Edit-a-Thon Writes 6,500 More Women Into Art History. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from https://news.artnet.com/art-world/2017-artfeminism-edit-thons-927797

[25] Dalit History Month 2017 edit-a-thon in Delhi, India. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from
https://cis-india.org/a2k/blogs/dalit-history-month-2017-edit-a-thon-in-delhi-india

[26] Black History Month edit-a-thons tackle Wikipedia's multicultural gaps. Retrieved February 20, 2019, from https://blog.wikimedia.org/2015/02/24/black-history-month-edit-a-thons

making our community more diverse. Being a contributor from a minority group cannot always be easy. In order to retain diversity, we need to help provide them with safe and conducive space to be a productive contributor. Only when they can write without fear of harassment and threats, can true diversity within open knowledge communities flourish. It will ensure that all subjects, and people from diverse backgrounds are equally and respectfully represented.

Whose knowledge gets represented and whose gets left out?

We also have to understand that there are some communities whose experience has been documented for centuries. Likewise, there are some communities whose experience is only beginning to get documented because they never had access to resources to document their history. In some cases, more powerful or better-resourced groups have documented the stories of groups that were oppressed or less powerful or less moneyed. Hence, the latter group may not have the necessary references to cite in order to support their version of the story.

At this point, it is important to reflect on "What is knowledge?" Who determines what sources are reliable or what are not? On what basis are those rules made? Are these rules inclusive? These rules impact the kind of material that gets narrated in public spaces, curated, and preserved and valued as knowledge. It determines the story that is dominant as opposed to the story that is discarded. The preservation of information becomes inaccessible for some groups when we deem only that information documented in books and journals as valid, and people's experiences as invalid. When we value one over the other, we create a barrier for people who cannot access academic spaces or avenues of *privilege*. Such spaces are accessible to only a handful of the world's population. And thus we contribute to those people's stories being forgotten.

Recommended reading
Whose Knowledge is a great global campaign to follow in order to understand how inequities of knowledge in terms of representation persist in cyberspace.

Points to Ponder
1. How would you feel if you were to find that most of the articles on Wikipedia about your country, state, province, region were written by people from a different continent who have never lived in the same place as you?
2. What would be your response if articles about your religion, caste, culture, food, language, politics or history were written by people who have no lived experience of the same?
3. Do we believe that everyone irrespective of their background should have access to different kinds of knowledge?

How does class play a role in the production of open knowledge?

Let's do an exercise. Please answer the following questions.

- As a child did you ever worry if you will get your next meal?

- When in school, did you ever worry if your parents/guardian would be able to afford the new book assigned?
- Have you ever had any constraints in accessing a library or course books?
- Have you ever needed to cancel your admission for a course because you were short of a few thousand rupees from the necessary fees?
- Do you have reliable and uninterrupted electricity supply at home?
- Do you have an internet connection at home?
- Have you ever experienced difficulties in accessing a personal computer, laptop, mobile phone or the internet?

If you answered the above questions in the negative, you belong to an economically upper class.

Why are we asking these questions?

Well, to be a regular contributor to Wikipedia or its sister projects, it is important to have the interest, willingness, and enthusiasm to volunteer one's time and efforts and do so without any remuneration. At the same time, it is important to have time and digital literacy to contribute. People who work long hours to fend for themselves and their families may have the willingness and interest to contribute to the exciting world of free and open knowledge but not necessarily have the time or opportunity to do so. Furthermore, contributing regularly to Wikipedia and/ or its sister projects requires one to have reliable access to some basic resources such as electricity, computer or mobile device, and a stable internet connection.

Access to information and knowledge

Let's do an exercise!

Which of the following do you think one needs in order to be a contributor to Wikipedia or its sister projects? Tick all the options you think are applicable:
☐ Electricity
☐ Library
☐ Encyclopaedia
☐ Computer/ Laptop/ Mobile Phone
☐ Internet connection
☐ Education
☐ Camera
☐ Transportation

Based on your answer to the previous question, what happens when a Wikimedian does not have access to the infrastructure she/he/they need to contribute freely:
Electricity

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_____

_____
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_____

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Library   (Physical   or online)_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Encyclopaedia (Print, web audio-video or in Braille)

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Computer/ Laptop/ Internet-enabled mobile phone _____

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Internet connection

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Education

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Camera

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Transportation

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Many places in India are still unelectrified or have irregular or limited electricity supply. Libraries are inaccessible to many. While the government is in the process of furthering its ambitious *Digital India* program*,* many people do not have access to computers, which makes it nearly impossible for a large section of the country to contribute. In other words, the only people who can contribute to free and open knowledge are those who have electricity connections, internet connections, and access to technology and knowledge. That costs money! And people from certain classes have more money than others, which they can spend on pursuits they are passionate or enthusiastic about. As a result, people from certain classes end up being the majority contributors to knowledge and information.

In our subsequent modules, we will have a detailed look at how various factors including caste, disability and other aspects have an impact on how open knowledge is produced and consumed in India.