'Creating Knowledge': Mapping the nature of content and processes on the English Wikipedia

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Introduction

Run a search on Google and one of the first results to show up would be a Wikipedia entry. So much so, that from 'googled it', the phrase 'wikied it' is catching up with students across university campuses. The Wikipedia, which is a 'collaboratively edited, multilingual, free Internet encyclopedia'[1], is hugely popular simply because of the range and extent of topics covered in a format that is now familiar to most people using the internet. It is not unknown that the 'quick ready reference' nature of Wikipedia makes it a popular source even for those in the higher education system-for quick information and even as a starting point for academic writing. Since there is no other source which is freely available on the internet-both in terms of access and information, the content from Wikipedia is thrown up when one runs searches on Google, Yahoo or other search engines. With Wikipedia now accessible on phones, the rate of distribution of information as well as the rate of access have gone up; such use necessitates that the content on this platform must be neutral and at the same time sensitive to the concerns of caste, gender, ethnicity, race etc.

The internet is considered a largely 'democratic' space, away from the tangles of the 'social'- with the assumption that its users' social realities do not have a bearing on the way they engage in a knowledge production exercise or in the way they articulate their identities online. There exists a possibility for anonymity as well as for chosen self-representation. The assumption is also that anyone *can* access the internet.

In the words of the Wikipedia founder Jimmy Wales, the Wikipedia aims to compile the 'sum of all human knowledge'. This knowledge on Wikipedia is sourced from knowledge that already exists- in the form of newspaper reports, journals, magazines and books. The unique feature of Wikipedia is actually not the 'what', but the 'how'. The volunteer-contributor nature of this online encyclopedia is considered its biggest strength, as also one of its weaknesses. The import of the massive exercise of creating a volunteer based encyclopedia with a scale of information like the Wikipedia is obvious only when one attempts to contribute.

A recent study by the Wikimedia Foundation indicates that around 91% of the contributor base of Wikipedia-Wikipedians (as they are called)-is male (Wikipedia Editors Survey Report, 2011) and Wikipedia acknowledges the non-neutrality of its articles resulting from a 'systemic bias'. What exactly is this 'systemic' bias? The bias stems largely from the demographic composition of the contributors on Wikipedia. The Wikipedia Editors Survey Report indicates that a significantly large proportion of the contributors are white and male[2], speak English and have undergone formal university education[3]. The very act of contributing on Wikipedia is dependent upon how much time one has for this purpose and one's access to resources such as a computer and the internet along with the necessary skills to do so[4]. Therein arises a content bias, where there is a tendency to write about topics that one already knows something about and a large chunk of the information is searched for and generated online. This specific composition of the contributors is reflected in the topics on which more articles are written, often representing certain cultures and points of view more than others. The greater problem is 'how' certain topics are written about and the social prejudices that are ingrained therein. As one of the interviewees for this research rightly pointed out, *'though this encyclopedia follows a different model, it is essentially created by the same group of people who created the Encyclopedia Britannica.'*

What is the problem with negligible female participation on a volunteer based online encyclopedia? Wikipedia has become the 'go to' place for information on anything under the sun and in the process

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[1] According to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia
[2] The top four countries on the contributor list are USA (20%), Germany (12%), Russia (7%) and UK (6%).
[3] 61% of Wikipedia editors who took part in the survey have a bachelors or higher/graduate degree.
[4] 92% of editors who participated in the study were proficient in computers: 56% were able to download and set up files and applications and programs and 36% could create their own applications.

has also become an 'agenda setter'. Wiki-visibility, defined as existence of a page on Wikipedia, inadvertently also confirms the notability of the topic-that it is something worth knowing. The converse is also true. For example, if a topic featured in the Encyclopedia Britannica, it was given a certain importance in terms of being something to be known or noted. If not, the likelihood of it being considered important would be lower. So, if the Wikipedia aims to be the 'sum of all human knowledge', then who creates it is as important as what is created.

This study attempts to look at pages related to women in the Indian context on the English Wikipedia with the aim of mapping the nature of content and making a link between the gender gap in the editor community to a gender bias (if any) in the content.

Objectives of the study

This research is a starting point towards understanding the discourse of knowledge production on women in the Indian context on the English Wikipedia. I have attempted to locate the systemic bias on Wikipedia in two locations- the composition of the editor community and the manifestation of this bias in terms of the nature of content. I also attempt to look at the gender gap with the evolving idea of an encyclopedia. In the larger scheme of knowledge production, this research also connects the problems of the NPOV (Neutral Point of View) and the culture of consensus on Wikipedia to the gender-gap.

Methodology

This research examines the content on the English Wikipedia to see whether there exists a systemic bias and examines the process by which knowledge is produced and disseminated on this platform. I have also extended the scope of this research beyond my original proposal to include the Wikipedians' perception of a 'gender gap'. At the outset, I find it necessary to state that my interest in this research project is driven primarily by my fascination with the idea of collaborative knowledge production- that a lay person, even I, can share knowledge with the world. This also links very closely to my naive assumption of the internet as a revolutionary, democratic and equal space for most part of my life. I must also admit that the thought of a discourse of knowledge production on Wikipedia in the Foucauldian sense, is something that occurred to me only during the course of this research. I'm also aware that the feminist lens through which I look at the findings of this research is in effect also a 'bias'.

The process of going about this research has been fairly streamlined in the sense that I could purposively sample the specific entries on Wikipedia that were pertinent to my area of interest. Since the Wikipedia is an open space and its changelogs[5] are public, I could simply enlist as a Wikipedian in order to edit and also have access to the changelogs freely[6]. The purpose of this exercise was to look at certain topics relating to women that have gained visibility and the process of creation of these entries culminating into the pages or stubs they are today.

There are two parts of this research. The first involves looking at the content in the Indian context through entries across three themes- Violence against Women, Women and the Law and Women and Performance (Women in the Public Sphere). I chose these themes with the help of very basic pointers that are listed below:

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[5] Changelogs is the term used for a record of changes made to a particular page, article, website etc. On Wikipedia, this is visible under the tab 'View History' on each article page which enables the viewer to look at all the changes/edits made on that page.

[6] Access is possible even without signing up as a user

a) The commonplace understanding of attitudes towards women in India and the perception of their roles in the spheres of family, community and the state.
b) Taking forward the discussion and debate around women's rights especially with an increased reporting of crimes against women in the national news in recent times
c) The need to highlight contributions of women, specifically women artists and performers in post-Independence India in the public sphere which has been a traditionally 'male' domain.

Under the first theme of Violence against Women, I started my search with the keywords 'Violence against women in India' which lead me to the Category page with 37 entries created under this head on Wikipedia. My intention was to include violent acts, specific incidents or cases of violence, entries on victims and perpetrators and civil society campaigns. I have looked at the pages listed on the aforementioned Category page, what issues are raised in the article, what is described, how it is described and what is the intention of this description as obvious to the first time reader. On a related note, under the theme 'Women and the Law', I have attempted to look at how the rights of women are communicated to a heterogeneous audience. Under this head, I have looked at three existing and/or prospective Acts and legislations. In the theme 'Women and Performance', I have selected entries on Indian female folk artists, female actors in Bollywood, classical dancers and television personalities. I have looked at the quality of articles, the presence or absence of information and perspectives on life stories. I have also attempted to trace a history of the edits in some of the cases reflecting popular interest in these topics as well as drawing attention to the subtle creation of a discourse. In all of these, I have made an attempt to look at the kind of references used so as to get an idea of the knowledge-network.

Besides mapping the content in these three themes, I conducted in-depth personal as well as telephonic interviews with people (henceforth referred to as Wikipedians) who presently edit on/contribute to Wikipedia. Though my intention at the outset was to look only at the English Wikipedia, I made some observations about Indian Language Wikipedias during the course of my interviews with Wikipedians who edit in more than one language.

I used a semi-structured interview process that included open-ended questions which I had pre-decided on the basis of some of the relevant findings on the systemic bias in the Editors Survey Report (2011). The interview schedule[7] included questions about the demographic position of the interviewees, their engagement with Wikipedia, the process of peer review of articles, their perceptions of the systemic bias as well as the gender gap and their opinions on questions of objectivity and neutrality on Wikipedia.

I interviewed a total of twelve Wikipedians out of which four (4) identified as female and eight (8) identified as male. I attained this sample by a snow-ball sampling method starting with writing to two Wikipedians on the WikiWomen's Collaborative India page on Facebook. One of them connected me to other Wikipedians in the city of Mumbai as well as those outside. In terms of geographical location, the interviewees were based mostly in Mumbai, as also in Chennai, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Silchar (Assam) and Kozhikode (Kerala). The interviewees have been editors on Wikipedia for varying lengths of time- the minimum being 6 months and the maximum being 9 years.

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[7] The complete interview schedule may be found in Annexure 1

Part I

This part of my research intends to map the content on Wikipedia and attempts to trace the transformation of Wikipedia over a decade from being informative to educative in its function. Foucault defines discourse as ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power appended relations and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. He looks at continuities and discontinuities in knowledge systems which inform thinking during certain periods of history.

Through analysing the kinds of references used to create articles on issues of culture, identity, gender, violence and the law, I wish to throw light on the kinds of sources used to create the online encyclopedia. I use the terms 'article' and 'entry' interchangeably throughout this report to refer to the individual content pages. In the course of my interviews with Wikipedians, I also asked them whether they considered Wikipedia a secondary reference for academic work. As I later mention, all except two interviewees said that they also see potential in Wikipedia as a credible starting point. What does this mean as an exercise in knowledge production? I talk about this later in the context of the 'consensus' as a tool for knowledge production on Wikipedia.

I also attempt to touch upon, through some examples, the potential of challenging hegemonic knowledge practices on Wikipedia.

Theme 1: Violence against Women

I began short-listing the entries for this subtheme by starting with the Category page on 'Violence against women in India' which lists out 37 entries under this them. This includes, as stated earlier, violent acts, criminal incidents, entries on victims and perpetrators and campaigns to end violence (both against women and men).

The first entry I looked at was the one on the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape Case. In line with the nation-wide public outrage in the wake of this case, the article is extremely detailed with adequate coverage of the crime perpetrated, the trial as well as the reactions both by the public and the government. The article was created 3 days after the incident took place and has been edited almost every two days since. The article is heavily referenced (174 on last count) mostly to newspaper dailies and magazines. In its 'See Also' section, one finds links to two categories of entries-general and rape cases. The former has six entries listed under it which are:

a) Capital punishment in India
b) It's Your Fault
c) Nirbhaya Fund
d) Nirbheek revolver
e) Rape in India
f) Women in India

The latter includes:
a) 2013 Mumbai gang rape
b) Aruna Shanbaug case
c) Mathura rape case
d) Pratibha Srikanth Murthy,a 2005 rape-murder case
e) Priyadarshini Mattoo, a 1996 rape-murder case
f) Soumya murder case

The second entry I looked at was that on Dhananjoy Chatterjee who was convicted of murder and rape and hanged in August 2004. The debate surrounding capital punishment that happened with regards to this case was the main reason I chose to look at this entry. The page is small and gives concise details of the case with brief information about the accused's location and occupation. All links to this page are from newspaper reports. Though the last edit was in January 2014, the article has been edited about twice a year since its creation on the day of the accused's hanging in 2004.

The third entry examined was the article on Sonali Mukherjee who was subjected to an acid attack in 2003. The article contains two-three sentences each on early life, incident, aftermath and appearance on Kaun Banega Crorepati. It does not contain a 'See Also' section linking to other articles. The only hyperlinked phrase pertaining to 'violence against women' in the text is that of the page on 'Acid Attack'.

The article on the MARD Campaign is the fourth entry under study in this section. The page contains a box on top that states that the article *'may not meet Wikipedia's general notability guideline'* and in the event of this persisting, it may be merged, redirected or deleted. The information on this page, other than the introductory sentence, is mostly about the popularity that this campaign has received. This in my understanding is partly due to the involvement of various Bollywood film personalities with the campaign. The page was created in March 2013, the same month as the inception of the campaign and has seen sporadic edits. Surprisingly, however, the page in its 'See Also' section links to the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance 2013 along with the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape Case.

The last entry in this section is that on Eve Teasing. This, according to me, is a well written article because it gives a concise introduction, history, depiction in popular culture, legal redress and public response. It also has a number of relevant links in the 'See Also' section which include:

a) Besharmi Morcha
b) Pink Chaddi Campaign
c) The Blank Noise project
d) Slutwalk
e) Sexism in India
f) Human rights in India
g) Feminism in India
h) Rape in India
i) Sexual harassment
j) Groping
k) Rape culture

The article had 33 references (on last count) and also suggested further reading including feminist perspectives on sexual harassment, protective laws and full text of the Vishaka Guidelines. The page was started in 2003.

Theme 2: Women and the Law

Related to Theme 1, I have attempted to look at four entries on laws pertaining to women in India. The first of these is the entry on Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005. The text of the Act itself has been cited extensively, making it factually correct and eliminating the possibility of a glaring gender bias. The page also includes criticism of the Act sourced from newspaper reports. It however also contains lengthy sentences (as in the example below) picked up straight from the Act which are difficult to comprehend for the reader accessing this page for actionable information.

While "economic abuse" includes deprivation of all or any economic or financial resources to which the victim is entitled under any law or custom whether payable under an order of a Court or otherwise

or which the victim requires out of necessity including, but not limited to, household necessities for the aggrieved person and her children, if any, stridhan, property, jointly or separately owned by her, payment of rental related to the shared household and maintenance and disposal of household effects, any alienation of assets whether movable or immovable, valuables, shares, securities, bonds and the like or other property in which the victim has an interest or is entitled to use by virtue of the domestic relationship or which may be reasonably required by the victim or her children or her stridhan or any other property jointly or separately held by the victim and prohibition or restriction to continued access to resources or facilities which the victim is entitled to use or enjoy by virtue of the domestic relationship including access to the shared household, "physical abuse" means any act or conduct which is of such a nature as to cause bodily pain, harm or danger to life, limb, or health or impair the health or development of the victim and includes assault, criminal intimidation and criminal force.

This page, through links provided in the 'See Also' section, led me to another page called the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act 2005 India which lists out, in brief, the provisions of each section of this Act. The article however does not have any references or links. It is listed as an 'orphan' article by Wikipedia. It has been edited consistently by one user.

The third page on Vishaka Guidelines regarding sexual harassment at workplace is very interesting because this page was created during the course of this research. I had mentioned this page as being absent with reference to the page on Bhanwari Devi. The article includes the provisions of the guidelines clearly. However, its format is slightly different compared to most other Wikipedia entries which begin with a short introduction and then go on to details. A large chunk of the background to the guidelines is given in the beginning to the article. It is a well written article in the sense that it clearly states, in simple language, what constitutes sexual harassment, the employer's obligations, the complaint mechanism and the preventive steps. It also links to four newspaper reports and three online journals as well as to the full text of the guidelines. In the 'See Also' section, it links to The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013

The Criminal Law Amendment Act 2013 is the fourth entry under study. It compares the Ordinance promulgated by the President of India in the immediate aftermath of the Delhi Rape Case and the Act that was passed by both houses of the Parliament along with the provisions therein. The penal provisions are stated clearly in tabular form. There is a section on Criticisms which includes basic pointers to the issues raised. The article has a 'See Also' link to the 2012 Delhi Gang Rape Case. The page through 'external links' leads to the full text of the Act.

Theme 3: Women and Performance

The first search I ran on Google was 'Indian Women Performers' which led me to a page on Indian Women Artists. This page mostly listed the names of Indian women painters and photographers, which prompted me to search specifically for individual folk artists (ones I was already familiar with) in India. The pages on Teejan Bai and Ila Arun are the ones I selected to review under this theme.

The page on Teejan Bai is a fairly concise one. It gives information on her early life, her performance style and her career. There is, however, more content on her personal life than about her engagement with the folk tradition. Moreover, the use of the phrase *'she was married twice, though none of her marriages succeeded'* seems out of place, firstly because it is not referenced and secondly because it has a tone of judgement eulogizing the institution of marriage. The page was last modified on December 8th, 2013. Seven out of the ten references are newspaper reports. The remaining two are blog posts. In the 'See Also' section, this links to the page on Music of Chhattisgarh.

The page on Ila Arun contains basic details about the singer/actor's life and career. The text is however garbled, repetitive and not organized in any particular order. Bits of information from the singer/actor's personal life find mention under heads like 'Acting'. The introductory line reads:

'Ila Arun is a popular Indian actress, TV personality and Rajasthani folk/folk-pop singer with a unique, husky voice and a penchant for folk-pop fusion. Her daughter is Ishita Arun.'

Since Ila Arun is better known for her singing prowess than for her acting, this introduction seemed a little out of place to me. The mention of her daughter in the first few lines is also not related. As Wikipedia states on the top of this page, 'This biographical article needs additional citations for verification.' None of the content is referenced and also conveys a bias towards the artist through statements like '*Her fans await her comeback*' and '*She has delivered an electrifying performance*' which are not sourced from any credible reviews. As mentioned, the single reference points to an IMDB page. Even though this page was last modified on February 4th, 2014, it has seen only sporadic edits (once every 2-3 months at best) since its creation in 2005.

The presence on television and in cinema is perhaps one of the reasons for better written Wikipedia articles. This is obvious from the well written articles on Bollywood film actresses such as Rekha. The article on Rekha is well written for two reasons- the first being that it is very well organized in terms of Rekha's early life, her career growth and filmography and secondly because it is an extensively referenced one with over 60 footnotes from newspaper reports and film magazines and nine references, out of which two are notable-one is an Encyclopedia Britannica entry and the other, a Routledge publication. The page is also fairly active in terms of edits as the last modification was on February 8th, 2014.

In the category of Indian Dancers, I've looked at three pages- Swapna Sundari, Sonal Mansingh and Shakti Mohan. The page on Swapna Sundari is a stub and is an almost untouched article, the last modification on which was in December 2012. The two references on the page are defunct and belong to non-government and non-organizational websites. The page on Shakti Mohan has most details about her achievement as a dancer on the TV show 'Dance India Dance' and her personal life with a disproportionate section about her family members. The article has no detail about her dance style or the details of her performance even though there is a heading called 'Live Performances'. Her endorsements do however find a mention in 'International Achievement'. The article was last modified on December 12th, 2013. The references to this article are all online newspaper sources.

The page on Sonal Mansingh on the other hand is a much more detailed article touching upon the aspects of her dance and career much more than details of her personal life. The introductory summary however contains a statement *'She was married and divorced to former Indian diplomat Lalit Mansingh'* which is not relevant to an introduction to her as a notable dancer. The article has 19 references and also provides links to further reading about and by the artist. The page was last modified on September 22nd, 2013. Five of the references are newspaper articles, one is a quarterly magazine and the rest are online non-organizational websites.

One of the reasons for the good coverage of articles on film personalities, as I see it, is the vast coverage given to films in Indian newspapers and the popularity of Bollywood films in general in South Asia. The type of references being used are mainly newspapers and this could be due to the fact that they contain the most up-to-date information. This may be easily contrasted against something like folk art forms which have a niche audience in the cities who see this as something of an 'exotic' experience and also perhaps on the other hand, a village-based audience that does not access the internet due to their geo-spatial location. Added to that is the fact that information on Bollywood is generally dynamic with multiple movies being released every week. The fact that this information is news based also means that it changes very often. This is not the case with something like folk traditions which are much less followed and feature much less in the news. Similarly, topics, personalities, themes that are contemporary are much more likely to find space in the public memory

than an event or person popular say- two decades ago, and hence are more avidly followed on the online space.

This is also supplemented by the finding that the Talk Pages of the entries on Swapna Sundari, Teejan Bai and Shakti Mohan do not have any content besides the rating of the article as being stubs and of low-importance on the *'project's importance scale'.* In case of Ila Arun, a question has been raised on the neutrality of the article and subsequently given up considering the inactivity. The entry on Rekha is heavily discussed with concerns over her name, death hoaxes and in which language the transliteration of her name should be done. Another important concern being raised is that of a non-Indian Wikipedian asking for discussions in English so that she/he may review the article for a 'Good Article' (GA) rating. This is being challenged by other editors.

Part II

This part of my research is explained by what one of the interviewees of this research pointed out very aptly:

'*Wikipedia is all about giving information and sharing knowledge. It is open and inclusive, not just in the end product, but also in the effort and the process'.*

Why use Wikipedia?

All the respondents are users of Wikipedia themselves and see Wikipedia as significant primarily because of its comprehensive nature. They feel that the chances of getting most information about a search entity on Wikipedia are higher than in any of the other ten search results that Google throws up. Alongside, the fact that all information on Wikipedia has citations and references, allows one to explore the topic further. One of the interviewees said that even if Wikipedia was not perfect and did sometimes have erroneous information, it would be matter of hours in which it would get rectified. The best feature according to another respondent is the hyperlink structure that provides a 360 degree view.

The two reasons that came up for engaging with Wikipedia as an editor were that people accessed information, could not find it and decided to put it up themselves or accessed information, found it to be faulty and decided to correct it. One of the interviewees also felt that since he had been accessing Wikipedia for many years before he found out that it was editable, the next logical thing that occurred to him was to contribute his share of knowledge. Referencing is seen as the backbone of Wikipedia by all the interviewees.

What on Wikipedia?

All the respondents edit on the English Wikipedia. Eight of them also edit in one of the following Indian languages, viz. Bengali, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Marathi, Tamil and Telugu. The interesting thing to note is while they edit topics of a somewhat global interest- like renewable energy, astronomy, retail, entertainment, tourist destinations, transport and fashion on the English Wikipedia, the topics that they edit on the Indian Language Wikipedia are somewhat region specific- such as regional folk traditions, regional literature, biographies and cuisine. None of the interviewees had observed a particular trend in terms of the kinds of topics edited on the Indian Wikipedias; all of them, however, acknowledged that since the editor communities on the Indian Language Wikipedias are still nascent and small, issues of gender have not been highlighted. One respondent however said that he had

made it a point to write on and edit topics relating to women and the law on Tamil Wikipedia after the issue of a gender gap came to his notice.

The flipside: Neutral Point of View (NPOV), Gender Gap, Systemic Bias and Sexism

The neutral point of view on Wikipedia is a rule. Neutrality must not however be confused with 'no point of view', which is an impossibility. It means however that as many biases as possible are removed. This is seen to be achieved through people of different gender, classes, castes, political and religious persuasions coming together to create an entry and skewing the information as close to the middle ground as possible. In the specific case of gender biased content, it is felt that there is a dearth of people with a feminist lens who can challenge sexism.

All interviewees acknowledged that there is a dearth of female editors of Wikipedia. Though the skewed proportion is not very obvious to most on the Talk Pages[8], it is quite evident in the number of female editors who attend Wiki meet-ups[9] and Edit-a-thons[10] as also in the coverage of 'notable women'. As one respondent rightly pointed out, it is not just in the number of pages that get created but also in what gets created and how it gets created that the absence of women editors is most obvious. Another respondent mentioned that in his experience of organizing workshops, women were reluctant to ask doubts. He added, '*They ask their female colleagues first. If they don't know, only then do they approach the males. Even that is through someone else. They will never ask you a question during the session. I therefore prefer having women editors teaching women how to edit.*'

The gender bias, though not obvious to all, has been noticed in some articles. Two of the interviewees were also of the opinion that since Wikipedia is open for all to edit, one need not talk about the problem of gender bias or theorize about it, but rather go ahead and edit it to eliminate the bias. As a response to this way of going about things, one interviewee pointed out that it was not enough for one person to make that one edit or one correction. She added, '*While that is one important part of the action, it is also necessary to have a systematic review of the articles in order to bring the encyclopedia to its full glory*'. It was even suggested that '*It would be great if we could bring together women's rights groups and sit down with ten pages pertaining to women or get ten women Wikipedians to do a two day workshop and go over information page by page.*'

Another interviewee said participation of women and other marginalised groups needed to be incentivised. He said, '*All of us would want to do what we're interested in. We all have inherent capabilities. Wiki capability trend is predominantly male oriented. There should be enough representation and incentives for a balance. More women would definitely mean more balance. There should be an attempt to understand the aspirations of the other parts of the population.*'

One respondent spoke at length about the various forms the gender gap could take. She said, '*there is sexism, misogyny, lesser number of articles of interest to women. Because of a skewed gender ratio, there are fewer articles on women. The articles that exist are not well fleshed out. There isn't always gender appropriate content or the gender perspective is lacking or missing from these articles.*

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[8] A talk page is a discussion page which Wikipedia editors can use to discuss improvements to an article/entry. Every entry has its Talk Page (as a tab on the top right). Individual registered users on Wikipedia also have their own Talk Pages where they may choose to talk about topics of their interest, projects they are a part of etc. From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Help:Using_talk_pages

[9] Meet-ups refer to regular (or more spontaneous) face-to-face meetings of Wikipedians that take place in cities around the world. From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Meetup

[10] An edit-a-thon is an event in which people work together in person to build content on a wiki. Edit-a-thons can be very informal or very structured; they can be designed as primarily outreach events (to draw in new contributors) or they can be set up more to meet the needs of long time contributors. From: http://outreach.wikimedia.org/wiki/Edit-a-thon

If we have more women editing Wikipedia, there will be more content pertaining to women. There will be a new perspective. The imbalance that we see in the editor profile will be addressed. An example is Kate Middleton's wedding dress. The article was removed for being frivolous and was later resurrected. It was treated as an important article in women's fashion. Articles on obscure technology, on small things on Linux are created and they stay, while articles relevant to women are deleted right away.'

One interviewee also felt that the findings of the Editors Survey had been misread and misquoted and that Wikipedia as a policy did not prefer a particular gender. He felt that, *'The problem is with creating interest in a group of people to edit. It is not something that Wikipedia does*'. He opined that *'all information in Wikipedia has to be objective according to policy and should not get carried away with emotions otherwise it can become a tool for propaganda for another set of audiences.'*

While none of the interviewees reported vandalism targeting gender or having personally experienced sexism on Talk Pages, all of them mentioned having heard of sexist remarks through other editors. One interviewee gave an example where there was a conversation where a male editor did not accept a female editor's edit just because she was female. The interviewee added, *'She had a reference and everything. The area was related to science. There were multiple theories that people were working on. The male contributor used the person's gender as one of the reasons to say that his point was better.'* All the respondents said that as long as an article contained different points of view with valid references, there did not seem to be a problem. Except for three respondents, all others did not feel that gender sensitivity conflicted with the idea of neutrality. One respondent even added that *'Gender sensitivity means that you are adding what is missing, you are not moving back from neutrality.'*

The use of gender neutral pronouns is also considered by three of the respondents as a step towards making Wikipedia more inclusive. Recently, a concern about was raised in the gender gap-mailing list where an editor said that *'In the Dutch Wikipedia, gender-neutral language is used for occupations and during the Art&Feminism edit-a-thon we remarked on how difficult it is to track down female artists if the lead sentence is gender neutral. This is compounded by the fact that the Dutch Wikipedia does not allow gender categories at all (which does solve the "Ghettoization" problem we constantly have in the English Wikipedia where women are in the "Women <skill>" categories rather than the main categories).'*

The knowledge creation process

As mentioned earlier, editors on Wikipedia have a talk page where one can ask them why they edited valid, referenced content or why they put up a page for deletion. There are also similar talk-pages for every entry. Usually what one does is put up a tag to mark errors. There is also a page for speedy deletion. In case of name calling, the administrators[11] (simply put, people who have been editors for a long time, having a certain number of edits to their credit) come in. In case of aggravated dispute, as in the case of pages like political borders and communal strife, the matter is referred to the arbitration committee. Such pages are also often closed for editing after a certain discussion has been settled.

None of the respondents mentioned any sort of alliance-building to counter vandalism or bullying. All the respondents seemed fairly satisfied with the way disputes are dealt with on Wikipedia. One interviewee mentioned that name calling is frequent but fall in the process of building the encyclopedia. Another interviewee said that *'the tussle is where you see the encyclopedia being*

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[11] Administrators are Wikipedia editors who have been granted the technical ability to perform certain special actions on the English Wikipedia, including the ability to block and unblock user accounts and IP addresses from editing, protect and unprotect pages from editing, delete and undelete pages, rename pages without restriction, and use certain other tools. From: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Administrators

created.' The closest that one comes to any process of coming together towards a cause is through Wiki projects which people join voluntarily based on their areas of interest. There is nevertheless the provision of the Watch List where editors can follow changes in topics of their interest. Three of the interviewees said that they had added gender related topics to their watch list.

It was also mentioned that vandalism or invalid edits are likely to survive for a long time on pages that are not watched regularly. One interviewee added that *'If one of the editors is putting up a biased article, there will be atleast 2-3 people trying to pull it back. That is the power of Wikipedia.'*

Ways ahead

While the matter of countering sexism and gender bias in terms of the content remains a prerogative of the vibrant editor community which is likely to be as dynamic as it is diverse, there are various steps being taken to ensure that people from diverse backgrounds become a part of the Wikipedian community. A popular post[12] calls the Wikipedian community *'a leaderless collection of volunteers who generally work under pseudonyms and habitually bicker with each other.'* I had asked each of the interviewees whether they perceived the aggression on talk pages a deterrent to new, especially female editors. The responses were mostly in the affirmative with both male and female respondents admitting to having felt intimidated during their first attempts as editors. All the interviewees also reflected on the positive side of the experience, saying that the aggression was more to do with a conflict of ideas, with one of the interviewees narrating, *'After the first time that I was literally shouted at, I've taken care to keep my edits as perfect as possible. Wikipedia does not seem welcoming to new-comers, atleast at the first go. And the first-go is when you make the most mistakes. You think you're a member and then you can edit. But you get pulled down a lot of times by the criticism. The community may not be welcoming but Wikipedia definitely is.'* One interviewee also mentioned that since she was not old enough on Wikipedia, she kept away from controversial topics. Six of the respondents said that an atmosphere of debate and questioning were essential to a collaborative initiative and one has to be very careful to not cross over into being abusive.

 The Tea House is a new initiative undertaken to encourage new editors on Wikipedia wherein a welcome message is sent to new users who enlist as editors. When asked for their opinion on the efforts to address the gender gap, ten out of the twelve respondents mentioned the Tea House as a step in that direction. They believe that the aggression on the Talk Pages especially towards new comers is a reality that can be toned down if the existing editors help familiarize the new ones with editing on Wikipedia. Small groups of Wikipedians also organize Edit-a-thons where existing editors as well as new comers meet and edit specific topics. Wiki projects are also spaces in Wikipedia where like-minded individuals can come together and strengthen the information on a particular topic of their interest, for example- Wikiproject Indian Women Artists, by dividing the work between themselves. One of the interviewees also felt that the accountability to creating a good source of information is much more when working as part of a project in a group. It was also mentioned by one interviewee that *'even though attempts had been made to engage women's rights groups in editing on Wikipedia, there was a bottleneck because first, there was a bit of technological barrier and also because a lot of the groups could not see the direct relevance of this exercise to their work.'*

While most of the interviewees found the Wikipedia interface to be easy to access and use themselves, as many as nine of them acknowledged that the tediousness of the wiki syntax could be a deterrent to a lot of new users. The Visual Editor which is being tested at present allows one to type with the same ease as typing on say Facebook or Twitter, and is seen to be a step forward despite

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[12] http://www.technologyreview.com/featuredstory/520446/the-decline-of-wikipedia/

some of the glitches that have been encountered. One suggestion was also that the Wikipedia app could be customised to the inexpensive tablets that the government provides in schools in rural areas. One respondent also suggested that Wiki Commons could be a starting point for people to click and upload an image that can be used for information. Eventually, he added, '*people will be encouraged to do more and will start editing too.*' Some initiatives have also been taken to involve women's colleges in editing on Wikipedia. Outreach programmes have also been planned for trans-persons.

While the Indian Language editor community is growing, there remains a problem in terms of addressing the gender gap on this space because of the volunteer nature of the exercise. Organizing an Edit-a-thon in an Indian Language and finding enough people who can and want to edit in that particular language and on particular topics is seen to be a difficult task. One interviewee also suggested that a strategy for growing the Indian language Wikipedia could be to translate relevant topics from the existing English language Wikipedia instead of doing all the research all over again.

All respondents except two also see potential in Wikipedia as a secondary reference for academic work. If not as a source to be quoted, they definitely see it as a first point of reference. One interviewee also added that if the like-minded academic community decided to come together to use Wikipedia, it would a great leap forward for Wikipedia as a source of knowledge because '*it would mean bringing in another set of scrutiny, another pair of eyes to look at the quality of articles which would ultimately only benefit the encyclopedia.*'

Reflections

Harvey Einbinder writes in the introduction to his critique of *Britannica*: '*since an encyclopedia is a mirror of contemporary learning, it offers a valuable opportunity to examine prevailing attitudes and beliefs in a variety of fields*'.

As mentioned earlier, Wikipedia is in essence a compilation of knowledge that already exists; or as Joseph Reagle says, '*It's not hard to see Wikipedia as a 'reordered book' of reconstituted knowledge.*' A 'good' Wikipedia entry adhering to the NPOV, taking into account various and diverging theories, while being definitively informative in its function, according to me lacks in its educative function because of the fact that it is not the sum of its parts. I say this specifically in line with Gorman's argument that

'The books in great libraries are much more than the sum of their parts. They are designed to be read sequentially and cumulatively, so that the reader gains knowledge in the reading. [...] The nub of the matter lies in the distinction between information (data, facts, images, quotes and brief texts that can be used out of context) and recorded knowledge (the cumulative exposition found in scholarly and literary texts and in popular nonfiction).' When it comes to information, a snippet from Page 142 might be useful. When it comes to recorded knowledge, a snippet from Page 142 must be understood in the light of pages 1 through 141 or the text was not worth writing and publishing in the first place.

The problem is that while the possibility of continuous editing may bring in various perspectives, the whole exercise is one of attempting to get 'closest to the truth'. Even though Wikipedia itself only has a 'verifiability' policy-that material on Wikipedia already exists elsewhere- and it does not make any claims about the truth of that material, the fact that Wikipedia aims to be 'the sum of all human knowledge' and is increasingly being seen as a starting point for academic work is a matter of concern. Moreover, if an unsuspecting user accesses this online encyclopedia at a certain point in its ongoing editing history and finds that the page on a female folk artist has a statement on her failed marriages, does that not negatively inform that individual's perspective on the artists and is that not a problem?

Another concern with regards to treating Wikipedia as a signifier of human knowledge is the categorization and the links therein. As has been the case with most encyclopedias historically, therein has been an agenda-social, political or religious- in the form of knowledge dissemination and in the way the content was organized. Lawrence Liang talks about the Encyclopedia as signifying the 'threshold of knowledge' and says that *'...every new encyclopedia is both a response to, as well as an intervention in, the question of how we know. And while classification is at the heart of this enterprise of ordering, every classification system is haunted by its exclusions, separations, and forced hierarchies, as well as its conversion of fluid emergent processes and events into stable categories.'* Though ostensibly Wikipedia Category Pages list topics in alphabetical order, eliminating any systemic hierarchies about which topics are more worth knowing, I see the links in the Wikipedia entries in the form of the 'See Also' headings as an example of the creation of a discourse. What am I expected to want to read after reading an entry on a rape case? More rape cases, or legislations, or feminist theory? The observation that none of the entries under study in the theme Violence against Women other than the MARD Campaign (which is not 'notable') contain any links to legislations or legal provisions is significant in this regard. What an article links to therefore, is what is first-considered worthy enough to be known, second-remains in public memory and third-becomes the definition for knowledge on that subject.

As Scott Kildall and Nathaniel Stern say:

'Wikipedia citations are performative. They do not merely have truth value, but are bound with actions and consequences. The addition of a new page to Wikipedia, for example, may be considered illocutionary (and require uptake) in its asking for permission to be posted as an article, or perlocutionary in its attempt to definitively frame a given subject. The implications of individual Wikipedia editors' actions, and the speech/language used to perform these actions, are far reaching.

As a case in point, David Horvitz once used Wikipedia to initiate cascading effects in the real world. At some point in the mid-2000s, Horvitz altered the Wikipedia entry for Ian Curtis –lead singer of Joy Division – to read that in the last moments before Curtis committed suicide, he glanced at one of Horvitz's photographs. The falseness of this tidbit was eventually found out and removed from the page, but not before it became part of the mythic story: many Curtis fan sites still include Horvitz in their account of his death.'

While Wikipedia continues to grow as an online encyclopedia and a source of knowledge, one must also raise critical questions about what the source of this information is. With this 'knowledge' now accessible on phones, it is all the more important to see how the knowledge network gets created. What are the entities that come together to form this knowledge? The question of the 'knowledge loop' becomes pertinent here-what information is used to constitute a Wikipedia entry and how does the Wikipedia entry inform other sources such as newspapers, magazines or even a research paper such as this?

Even though the respondents in this study say that there is no covert alliance-building process while editing or creating entries, it seems obvious to me that the consensus that they talk about is actually not a question of what is right and should be included as per a moral guideline, but more of how many editors' support one has on the viewpoint one is advocating for. Latour uses the term *'the argument from authority'* to describe this very phenomenon.

Interestingly also, why are certain topics written about and why are certain others left out? Is 'wiki-visibility' an incitement to a discourse on knowledge?

The interest in the gender question or the lack of it on the Indian language Wikipedia as it seems from the interviews is also a thread that I see emerging from this research. Though exploring the question is beyond the scope of this research, it would be an interesting thought to follow. The issue of the

hegemony of the English Language over issues which have a 'popular' or 'global' appeal is also an emerging thought.

1. Do you speak English?
2. Are you conversant with computers?
3. What is your profession?
4. Do you use Wikipedia?
5. Why do you think it is significant?
6. Do you edit on Wikipedia?
7. How long have you been an editor on Wikipedia?
8. Why did you start editing on Wikipedia?
9. How often do you edit on Wikipedia?
10. Do you edit on any Indian Language Wikipedia?
11. Could you list some of the topics you've written on or edited content in both on the English language Wikipedia and Indian language Wikipedia (if so)?
12. There has been a lot of mention about the systemic bias on Wikipedia of late on the internet. What is your opinion on this?
13. Do you think raising questions about gender sensitivity conflicts with Wikipedia's claim to a neutral point of view?
14. What are the key criteria for you while writing, editing or reviewing?
15. What is that you 'edit'?
16. Have you encountered invalid, incorrect, biased, otherwise problematic content?
17. Is there a space for discussion of what qualifies as valid content?
18. What is your opinion on this space?
19. As per the Editor's Survey, about 90% of the contributor base on Wikipedia is male. Does this reflect in the discussion on the nature of content?
20. What is the composition of participants in a discussion, on say-gender sensitivity?
21. Is this discussion moderated? If yes, how? If no, do you think it needs to be? Or do you think moderation results in sweeping issues under the carpet?
22. Do you feel there is sexism on discussion fora?
23. Do you find male contributors receptive to concerns of the gender gap?
24. Have you experiences any vandalism of content?
25. Is there any sort of 'alliance-building' with regards to articulating gender concerns?
26. What are the results of these discussions and alliances? What changes?

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