

The Digital Gender Disparity

Understanding the Gender Gap and Bias in Digital Knowledge Ecosystems

Yashashwani Srinivas
Access to Knowledge Programme
Center for Internet and Society
Bengaluru, India

ABSTRACT

The problem of gender gap and bias has been prevalent across digital spaces for several years now and continues to challenge knowledge production across themes and diverse formats. Presentation of content on gender and sexuality in Indian languages further faces additional infrastructural and conceptual challenges. Wikimedia projects that constitute a significant part of the knowledge production and digital ecosystem have acknowledged and worked towards bridging this gap through various global initiatives. This short-term research study on mapping repositories on gender and sexuality in Indian languages seeks to understand the challenges related to the creation of digital content on gender and sexuality and how this may contribute to a further disparity in and lack of visibility of such content on open knowledge platforms such as Wikimedia projects. The study draws from mainstream discourse on gender and sexuality, particularly concerning content production, its dissemination and digital documentation through conversations with content creators and curators working in these areas. Furthermore, it aims to collaborate with

participants to explore possibilities and strategies to bring this knowledge on gender and sexuality in Indian languages on open access platforms such as Wikimedia projects.

KEYWORDS

Gender Gap, Indian Languages, Gender Bias, Women,

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- a. To understand existing disparities in digital content on gender and sexuality and allied topics in Indian languages and how these gaps impact the process of content creation on Indian language Wikimedia projects.
- b. To map content available with individuals and institutions working on gender and allied topics in Indian languages.
- c. To enlist possible pathways to overcome these challenges that hinder the process of knowledge production and digital documentation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study adopts a qualitative approach,

comprising mainly semi-structured interviews and discussions with individuals and organisations working in this space. To obtain a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the topic, two subthemes were chosen under the larger themes of gender and sexuality – a. Cultural History b. Feminist Production and Publication. The study aimed to map online, and offline content in four Indian languages, namely Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Marathi; the languages were chosen based on the researcher's proficiency in conducting interviews and engaging with the content.

Through purposive and convenient sampling methods, respondents were chosen for the interviews across categories, such as writers, translators, content creators/curators, educators and artists. Nineteen interviews were conducted, comprising eight organisations and eleven individuals. The tools used for data collection were semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and email responses.

The principal methodological challenges were as follows

- a. Due to the pandemic and the increased digital reliance, a few potential respondents were inaccessible or unavailable.
- b. Finding respondents that lie at the intersection of digital space, knowledge production in Indian Languages, and gender and sexuality was a challenging task. This further reduced the pool of respondents we

could engage with as part of the study.

OBSERVATIONS AND ANALYSIS

The data that has been collected is rich and vast and offers several learnings on the intersectional nature of the problem of digital content production on gender and sexuality and where linguistic and technological barriers may complicate it. This presentation will delve into two early learnings and observations.

a. Reproduction of Ramifications

The gender gap on digital platforms like Wikimedia reflects more significant socio-political and gendered disparities in society. The ramifications of this divide are reflected in the way they hinder the process of knowledge production on gender and sexuality. Examples include the lack of digital documentation of the content of gender and sexuality, particularly in Indian languages, lack of access to infrastructure and resources, and challenges with community health. The intervention of various social groups, quite often the marginalised, has helped reclaim some of these spaces and produce rich collections of content on gender and sexuality. Notable here is the role of social media in content production and dissemination across multimedia formats.

b. Locating a critique

Addressing the gender gap through knowledge production on gender and sexuality demands an intersectional perspective that engages with caste, class, gender, region etc. Specific examples here include challenges of translating conceptual vocabulary on gender and sexuality across Indian languages or the framing of feminist critique from an Anglocentric perspective. Efforts in content curation and production on Wikimedia projects need to engage with these critiques and approach work with a similar intersectional perspective.

CONCLUSION

This research study is currently in the stage of data analysis, with the report being drafted, and carries other learnings and pivotal insights that have been obtained in the process. Following a review process, a final report will be made available on Meta-Wiki, and relevant mailing lists. The project offers several learnings in terms of the mainstream discourse on gender, sexuality and feminism in India, and where this may inform work related to bridging the gender divide on open knowledge platforms such as Wikimedia projects and communities.

REFERENCES

- a. Wikimedia Meta-Wiki. Research: Bridging the Gender gap: A Report on Indian Language Wikimedia Communities, Retrieved from https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Research:Bridging_the_Gender_gap:_A_report_on_Indian_Language_Wiki_media_Communities
- b. Wikimedia Meta-Wiki. Research: Mapping Repositories on Gender and Sexuality in Indian Languages - A Short Update, Retrieved from https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/CIS-A2K/Research/Mapping_Repositories_on_Gender_and_Sexuality_in_Indian_Languages_-_A_Short_Update
- c. Wikimedia Meta-Wiki. Research: Mapping Repositories on Gender and Sexuality in Indian Languages, Retrieved from https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/CIS-A2K/Research/Mapping_Repositories_on_Gender_and_Sexuality_in_Indian_Languages