

Intersectionality

explained.



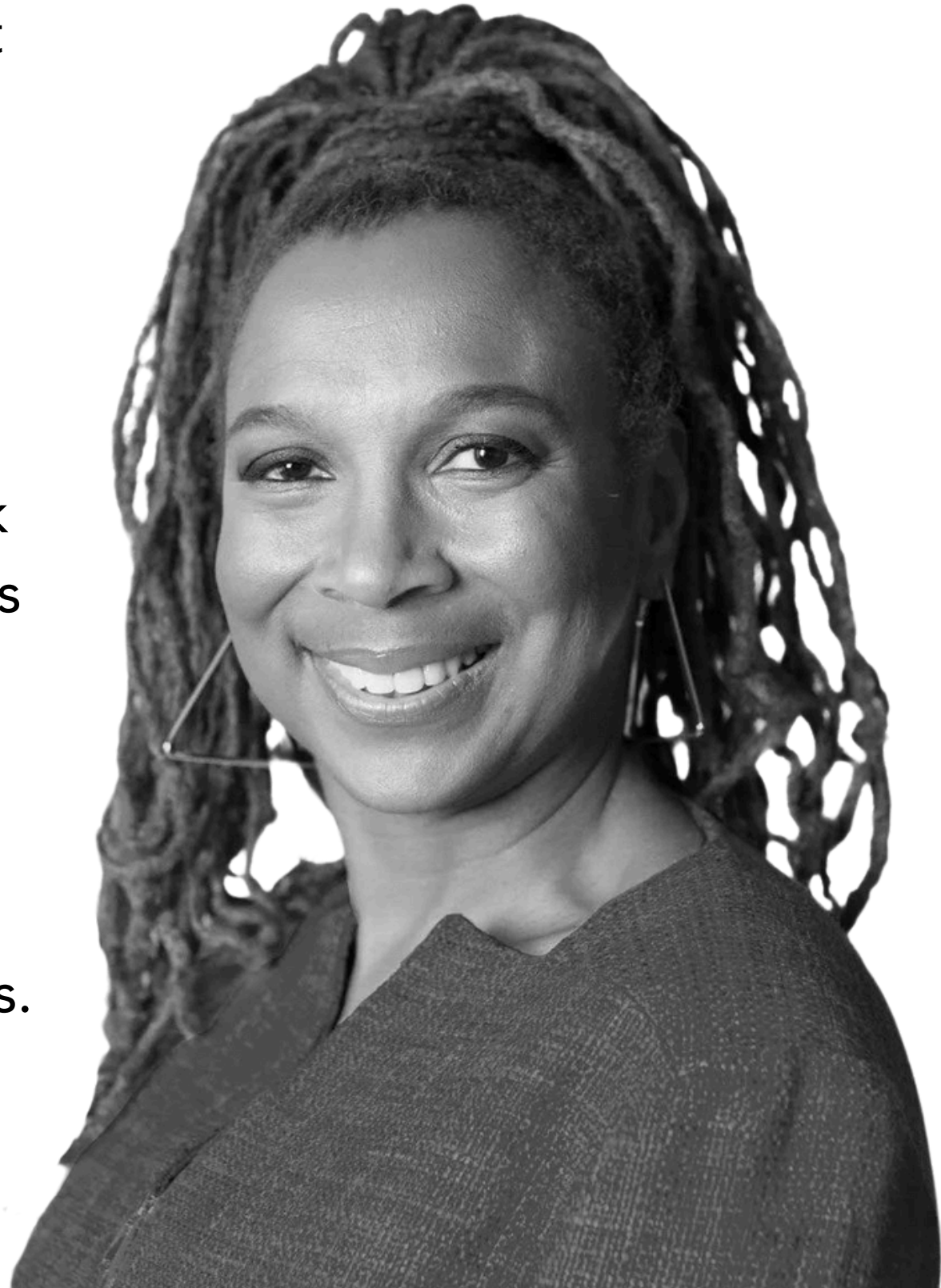
What is **Intersectionality**?

It's how social and cultural roles, identities, and categories intertwine in our identities, and in how others treat us. It was first conceptualised as a legal framework to understand discrimination against Black women on multiple axes.



What is its **history**?

Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the concept in her 1989 paper, **“Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.”** She showed that focusing on race alone could erase Black women’s considerations in legal, political and social terms. It’s now a key part of feminist conversation – and important to DEI efforts.



How can I understand it better?

This 'umbrella' concept, created by Patricia Hill Collins and Valerie Chepp, makes it easier to visualise.



Systems of power intersect and coproduce each other



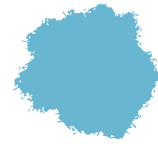
Knowledge is situated within these power relations



Systems of power are constituted and maintained through relational processes



Worldviews and standpoints are also relational and coconstructing



Boundaries are significant in their existence and in the transcendence



There is a concern with complexity within intersectional research

How is it relevant to **India**?

In the social sciences and in public conversation, the framework has been a crucial tool to understand discrimination faced by women from Dalit and bahunjan communities on account of both gender and caste. It's now a key tool in the work of disability rights and queer rights scholars, activists, and civil society organisations.



— What does it mean for my workplace? —————

Most DEI work in white-collar India focuses on women, queer folks, and persons with disabilities. But it's important to ensure that the understanding of these categories is intersectional in nature. To make inclusion work for all of us, we have to understand overlapping/intersecting experiences and the idea people come from multiple social points (religion, age, language, caste, and more) which impact our participation in the world.

Check the next image.

INDIAN WHEEL OF POWER & POWERLESSNESS



The Wheel of Power/Powerlessness

The Indian Wheel of Power & Powerlessness, adapted by **The Listeners Collective** from **Sylvia Duckworth's Wheel of Power/Privilege**, is a tool to understand intersectionality. Similar to Gayle Rubin's 'The Charm Circle,' the wheel creates a comprehensive and intersectional view of our social structures. The inner circle represents the power of society and state. As we move out, we see which groups are further from power.

Know more about Intersectionality

Reading reccos to learn more:

- The Intersectionality Wars by Jane Coaston
- Revisiting Intersectionality in India: A Dalit Feminist Perspective by Vaishali Khandekar
- Is 'Intersectionality' a Useful Analytical Framework for Feminists in India? by EPW

Revisiting Intersectionality in India

A Dalit Feminist Perspective

The intersectional framework has been one of the most important contributions to feminist studies. It has since travelled outside the United States in the last three decades and has also gone through much development in India during this time. Along with other categories like sexuality and religion, it has rightly brought attention to Dalit women who were often overlooked in earlier conceptions and movements under feminist studies in India.

Is 'Intersectionality' a Useful Analytical Framework for Feminists in India?

The Discussion Map charts important debates from the pages of EPW.

Kimberle Crenshaw theorised "intersectionality" as a concept in a 1989 [article](#) titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." She sought to capture the simultaneous and compounded form of oppression that African American women experience; a form she argued was not investigated by traditional anti-subordination frameworks. Since then, in the Indian context, the concept of intersectionality has been utilised by feminist, anti-caste, disability rights and queer rights scholars, activists, and organisations.

In her 2015 article, Nivedita Menon offers four major critiques of intersectionality, arguing against its use, particularly in the Indian context. She writes that the use of intersectionality as a concept by development agencies such as the United Nations has increased its popularity and has depoliticised the concept, serving as a reminder of the global North's hegemony in setting theoretical paradigms. Additionally, she argues that owing to India's anti-imperial struggles, leaders and practitioners are constantly "engaging with multiple identities." She supports this argument by presenting a range of political positions on debates related to the women's movement. Meena Gopal replies to Menon, suggesting that she has not accurately represented the movement and has made key slippages in presenting a range of opinions. Mary E John responds to Menon as well, saying that intersectionality's history requires more thorough recognition and that Menon's examples do not demonstrate intersectionality's redundancy in India.