

Archana Kaware

School of media and cultural studies

Tata Institute of Social sciences, Mumbai.

**Title: Gender, caste and technology in Maratha Kranti (Muk) Morcha.**

This paper critically engage with history, politics and women participation in Maratha Kranti Morcha.

The claimed motivation for ‘Maratha Kranti (Muk) Morcha’ was Kopardi rape and murder case. The case in which the 14-year-old girl (belonging to the Maratha community) was found raped and murdered on a field on July 13, 2016, in Kopardi village of Ahmednagar district. (Banerjee, 2017) After the incident first shutdown or bandh took place in Karjat on 14<sup>th</sup> July 2016.

Then protest spread to various districts of Maharashtra. First protest happened in Aurangabad on August 9, 2016. Protest had demanded a quick investigation and a speedy trial in the case for justice to victim. Since the victim belonged to the Maratha community, silent marches were taken up by the Marathas across the state against the three culprits who belonged to the Dalit community.[ CITATION Kav161 \l 1033 ]

The case was also discussed in the Maharashtra Assembly during the Monsoon Session. After this, Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis announced that the accused have been arrested and the matter will be heard in a fast-track court. Following the state-wide protests, the Maharashtra government also appointed noted criminal lawyer Ujjwal Nikam, who has appeared in several high-profile cases including the 26/11 Mumbai terror attack, as the special public prosecutor in the case. (NDTV, 2017)

On October 7, 2016, a 350-page charge sheet is filed by the prosecution in the Ahmednagar District and Sessions Court under sections 302, 376 (a) and 120-B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and relevant sections of Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act. (NDTV, 2017). On November 18, 2017, A special court held the accused guilty of raping and murdering the minor. On November 29, 2017, Ahmednagar Sessions Court awarded the death sentence to the accused. (www.thehindu.com, 2017)

Starting from first silent march in Aurangabad on August 9, 2016 to last march in Mumbai on august 9, 2017 about 56 silent marches organized across Maharashtra by Maratha community. (maratha kranti morcha, n.d.) It started with protest for death sentence to accused and that the case should run in fast track court. But with time Marathas added demands like dilution of the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Caste and Tribes (Act) 1989, reservation to

community in education and government jobs, implement recommendations of National Commission on Farmers chaired by Dr. M. S. Swaminathan etc. In the beginning all have supported the marches for justice to victim and implementation of Swaminathan Commission's recommendations. But when it added demand about dilution of Atrocity Act, Dalits left the protest. [ CITATION Paw161 \l 1033 ] Same thing happened when MKMM (Maratha Kranti Muk Morcha) added demand of reservation in education and government services. Rumors went viral on social media that if Maratha given the reservation, they will be given it under OBC category and it will take seats from OBC category. This led to withdrawal of support of the existing OBCs in MKMM marches.[ CITATION Paw161 \l 1033 ]

While from June to next few months in 2017, farmers' protest started separately across the Maharashtra for their demands. This was exclusively about farmers' question and not of any community. So, MKMM demands became specifically for Maratha community. Slogan was 'Ek Maratha, Lakh Maratha', which is exclusively use for circulation and emotional appeal to Maratha community. In post June of 2017 MKMM become passive and Farmers' protests were ongoing with up and downs with policy making about 'Remunerative Agricultural Prices'. MKMM become only for Maratha and Farmers chose another alliance for protest. MKMM took its final silent march on August 8, 2017 in Mumbai and memoranda of protest handed over to Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Devendra Fadnis.

### **Why Maratha politics suddenly became the intensive?**

Maharashtra consists of four regions: western Maharashtra, Konkan, Marathwada and Vidarbha. The State has a territory of 3,07,690 sq.kms., inhabited by 78.75 million, as per the 1991 census. Maharashtra, as a separate state, was created in 1960.

State formed on the basis of Marathi language. But playing politics of Marathas was not beneficial politically. Palshikar explained the strategy,

'On the eve of the State's formation and afterwards, Y. B. Chavan emphasized two things: one, the State would be governed by Marathi people and not Maratha and, secondly, the State would usher in an era of the rule of Bahujan Samaj - majority of the common masses. The message was simple, 'Bahujans' implied non-elite, oppressed, non-Brahmin castes. Chavan's strategy of opting for the term 'Bahujan', instead of Marathas, paid off.' 'The fact that Maratha caste-cluster accounts roughly for more than one-third of the population made the Maratha leaders the rightful contenders for leadership of the State and for Maratha domination.'

(Palshikar, 1994).

Maratha leadership was under pressure from the ideological rhetoric of 'Bahujanwad'. While Deshpande argued that the proper Marathas always opposed Kunbi moves of upward mobility

and developed a strict internal hierarchy within themselves. Kunbis were treated as inferior in spite of democratic pressures to forge a numerical unity of these two castes. (Deshpande, 2004). But later Maharashtra included the Kunbis in the list of OBCs when Mandal commission recommendations were implemented in the state. Deshpande saying this as 'backward journey of caste' argued that the decision was controversial because most of the Kunbis are locally dominant. However, none of the political parties in the state, including the backward caste parties opposed the decision then. These parties tried to work out a numerical majority of the Dalits and the OBCs in the state. Most of the backward castes in Maharashtra have a localized and numerically marginal existence. Inclusion of Kunbis in the OBC list proved crucial for the backward caste parties in imagining a numerically strong alliance of the backward castes. (Deshpande, 2004). This reservation help to have numerically strong alliance of OBC and Dalit. Though Deshpande called this as 'backward journey of caste', inclusion of Kunbis in OBC is accepted by the community, because they were culturally close to those OBC communities. And also they were treated inferior by the Marathas.

Marathas have been a landholding community. Which is a crucial means to controlling hierarchy and resources. Dahiwale urged in 1995 that a dominant caste is determined by its numerical strength, its extent of economic and political control, and its superior status in the caste hierarchy. For a caste to be dominant 'self-image as rulers' (coined by David Mandelbaum cited by Dahiwale) [ CITATION SMD95 \l 1033 ]is needed, which Marathas have. And they continuously called themselves fellows of Shivaji. In Indian villages, land is the principal source of economic control. Those who possess substantial land can exercise control over the landless and the marginal landholding families since the latter are dependent upon big landholders for their livelihood. During post-independence period, traditional agronomy has changed and a process of agro-based industrialization has taken place in certain parts. (Dahiwale,1995).

Majority Marathas are now farmers. As the agriculture sector is most affected in industrialization, they faces so many problems. There are problems about natural disaster like famine, drought, and heavy rain and so on. In spite of this there has been serious issue of remunerative price for agricultural produce. It never channeled effectively by rulers. Led to affect farmers economically. Farmers' suicides are common across Maharashtra. As the Maratha community has been landholder and majority of them are small farmers, they are one of the most affected by agricultural crisis. Dominant community in Maharashtra became poor due to their dependence on agriculture. This is the backdrop for their insistence of opportunities for in education and government jobs by reservation. And they came on road for demands. Kopardi case was just a starting instinct of Morcha.

### **What MKMM mean in context of caste pride?**

Violence against women is not a new thing to Maharashtra or to the society at large.

“Historically, rape has been the precipitating event that has led the autonomous women's movement in India to engage with the law and to forge a collective visible presence in public spaces. These engagements have also made talking about women's sex and sexuality in public respectable, as long as it was focused on sexual violence. Cases of sexual assault have been the rallying ground for demanding gender-just law reforms...”

Kumar, (1993).

Maharashtra have seen brutal cases like Khairlanji. But the attention which the Kopadi rape and murder case, got was not witnessed in any other case in Maharashtra. Nor did it get the support of the various institutions in the society.

The immediate response to the Kopardi case was “How Dalit dare to look at Jijau’s (mother of Maratha Empire Chhatrapati Shiwaji) daughter?” Here the clear cut caste hierarchy is maintained and more than incident attention is given to caste of victim and accused. Communal hate becomes incentivised when MKMM added demand of dilution of the Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Caste and Tribes Act, 1989. Slogans like “*Bajjade Ladhle Maatisathi, Ekda Ladhu Jatisathi*” (past generations fought for mother earth, lets fight once for our community). The immediate result of this is the distrust of the Dalits who initially solidarised with the movement. Same thing happen with demand of reservation. With the cause ‘Maratha should not come in OBC category, as they will take our seats and also socially they have dominated us’ OBC support also removed. And Maratha community was isolated for their demands.

### **Gender based agency to technology in MKMM**

All management, production and circulation of MKMM happened in cyber space. Facebook, what’s App, Twitter were actively used for circulation of information about MKMM. They also created official website <http://www.marathakrantimorcha.org> which has information about upcoming events, management, images and holder to circulate and code of conduct. Images circulated prominently feature have face of girls-women’s. Even in hoardings and banners of Morcha faces of angry adolescent girls were used. And those images, videos of speeches by girls (including a 4 year old) widely circulated and used on social media as well as mainstream media. Face of Morcha became women! Face of Maratha girls was everywhere in cyber space and on posters. But what about women’s accessibility to technology itself? How many women have mobile phones? How many women have smart phones? And how many of them have access to internet? Women’s participation in cyber space was tokenized and commodified through the use of just their face and speeches. Even the all speeches have same tone and content. It is almost as if it was designed like a guidebook. Four year old girl is speaking about murder, reservation, suppression of Maratha in education and other demand of MKMM! They are speaking about women’s participation, majority of whom don’t have access to phone and internet, while protest

became huge success (in context of mass gathering) due to social media or cyber space. Is this a women's participation and presentation in technology or protest itself?

### **Virtual reality? -Face of MKKM on social media and ground realities:**

Virtually the face of protest was of women though majority Maratha women don't have access to phones or internet. Women's participation in Maratha Kranti Morcha was limited to their faces on posters, speeches on stage by few girls. I went through top 200 images of search on Maratha Kranti Morcha marches on Google, out of which only 5 have women's presence in it. In those five images, two was on stage, two was girls in protest and one was women in protest. Other all images were of men's participation in protest. Those images have shown massive gathering of Marathas. Some of the images were edited to show massive gatherings. Those images used for circulation. Mainstream media also given lot of attention to Maratha Kranti Morcha. "The processes by which a given social dispensation produces and reproduces itself in and through a particular set of media" such that claims to authentic knowledge of bounded cultures give way to reflexive accounts of multiple "nodes of mediation where value is often produced and contested" (Mazzarella cited by Sahana Udupa).[ CITATION Udu12 \l 1033 ]

Udupa stated that attention to the internal workings of the news media suggests that the uneven flows of globality (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1996 cited by Udupa) relate directly to unevenness within the field of the news media and to struggles for dominance and difference.

"This, among other things, means that local-global formations are embedded in the dynamics of trans-local and re-territorialized fields of news and, therefore, cannot be reduced to generalized claims advanced either by pessimists of cultural homogeneity and capital-imprinted difference or by optimists of local resistance. Rather than considering localities as mere outcomes of difference-producing capitalist machinery or as authentic, preexisting sites of cultural common sense, it is fruitful to examine the web of mediations and divergent practices of the media. This is especially pertinent at a time when the local has gained significance for the news media as at once an object of representation and a mediating context."

[ CITATION Udu12 \l 1033 ]

Maratha Kranti Morcha was highly symbolized to show patriarchy. Men were wearing Pheta<sup>1</sup> and Gandhi cap of saffron color. There were posters with images of Shivaji, tiger and 'Ek Maratha, lakh Maratha'. When protest happened there was limited participation of women. Most were chaperoned in cars and motorcades which prominently had flag waving men on motorcycles. Women were just on stage and very few in women compartment of gathering. Images and videos can prove this easily. The only space they were was stage with bunch of girls repeating speeches in various protest across Maharashtra. Production and circulation of those videos is done by men. There is limited agency to technology to women. Technology is always

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<sup>1</sup>the traditional turban worn in Maharashtra, India

seen as men's job. Rural and economically backward women are still dependent on male family member for technology. Why they were in less number is clearly due to two reasons: caste pride and access to technology. Their participation was necessary in protest and how to take them out was question of Maratha honor. So they put them on posters. The protest forgot that there is body, mind, brain and identity to face. Maratha women never came out in front of others. They are not allowed to do so to maintain 'purity of caste'. With time it's diluted to some extent. But also again reflected in protest, saying "Do not attempt to gaze at Jijau's daughter". So, they were not visible on streets for protest. That's why, the virtual and even physical face of Maratha Kranti Morcha was not gender inclusive.

### **Conclusion:**

The agenda of justice for rape victims was co-opted for a casteist and patriarchal assertion of the Maratha identity in Maratha Kranti Morcha. Protest haven't spoken about patriarchal and masculine nature of system and society while protesting violence. What all mattered in this is caste of victim and accused. Social media offers possibilities of greater participation in public debates. But it has limitations in India's contemporary public sphere. Socialbakers (2013) indicates that in India, 48% of users on Facebook are between 18 and 24 years old. The second largest user group (with 28% of users) is between 24 and 35 years old. Together these two groups make up for 76% of the total users of Facebook in India.(Valerie,2013). Then what will be the women's virtual participation in Maratha Kranti Morcha? A women's agency to technology is channeled by patriarchal inherent. Then also virtually it's made like it's a women's participation in protest against violence in Maratha Kranti Morcha. This is itself a huge gender based cyber violence against the large number of women who don't have access to technology. Which is dangerous not only to gender equality but democracy.

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