

Television of a Marathi Past: The Brahmanical emancipation of women in *Uncha Mazha Zoka*, a Marathi TV show based on Ramabai Ranade's life

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Abstract

Marathi Television has been at its peak in the last decade. Marathi Television has often come up with strong female protagonists, right from Paulkhuna (1993), to Damini (1998-99) and finally to the recent Uncha Maza Zoka (2012-13). 'Uncha Maza Zoka' was a prime time show based on the life of Ramabai Ranade, the wife of Justice M.G. Ranade: both renowned social reformers of 19th century Maharashtra.

While sitting in front of the television screen and watching the prime time show 'Uncha Maza Zoka', I was put into a sense of discomfort when I looked at the satisfied smiles of my 'upper' caste, upper middle class, Marathi family. When I took up this discomfort into the realm of academic enquiry using the theories of feminist television studies and the studies on 19th century Brahmanical patriarchy, I could put myself in a position to make an argument about why this show, based on the progressive history of Maharashtra, brings smiles to the faces of people and why it makes them 'feel good.'

In this paper, I argue that this representation of reform and women's emancipation in a Brahmanical setting, forms some sort of a post-feminist assurance, restores faith in family and nationalism for the conservative but forward-looking by erasing their anxieties about loss of 'Indian culture,' and also doesn't leave any space to suggest that 'the progressive' viewpoint wasn't enough to end all kinds of oppression. From a feminist and an anti-caste perspective, I try to analyze who is the true protagonist of this show, what televising such a representation does to the narrative itself, and how the (regional

language) television screen comforts its consumer audiences with tales of the glorious past of Maharashtra. The region and its past are thus immortalized on screen, and its broadcasting is just another reinforcement of a truly 'Brahmanical' narrative of women's empowerment.

Keywords: Marathi television serials, caste, Ramabai Ranade, women's empowerment, Brahmanical patriarchy.

Introduction

“Women, not excluding Brahmin women, are the worst victims of this Brahmin law. So, women, particularly the Brahmin women, should consider the destruction of Brahmanism their primary goal in life. It is only when Brahmanism is dead true liberation of women can take place. Women libbers please note.”

- V. T. Rajshekhar (1981)

Author's note: I am a *Savarna* (caste Hindu) woman, and have lived and interacted with plenty of Marathi Brahmin people, including my own family. My position of privilege in this region and society is undoubted, almost next to the fair Brahmin heterosexual male in the hierarchy. Also, as Rajshekhar suggests, it is one of my primary goals to destroy Brahmanism. I owe my caste consciousness and my interest in annihilation of caste to the sincere and passionate people working continuously and relentlessly to further Dalit scholarship and assertion. Without their resistance to the Brahmanical worlds of oppression, I wouldn't have been able to reflect on the several sociological manifestations of Brahmanism in my own living room. And I believe the politics of the living room lies at the heart of television studies.

Television Studies

The discipline of Television Studies in India has had only a very few academicians studying the representation of women on the small screen. Though few, most of them have contributed heavily by analysing the shift from the state's ownership of television broadcasting to that of private players, and also by arguing how representation of women, their sexuality, their

aspirations, the 'erotic' is shaped both on television and in households where it is consumed (Mankekar 2004). In the neo-liberal era, the screen becomes a shop and content is married to advertising. While the content of television is supposedly “women-oriented” or “family oriented”, the producers sell their shows with the logic that they are simply offering what the 'middle class housewife,' demands; and hence if she demands '*saas-bahu*' kitchen dramas, they will supply it to her. This simple logic often goes unchallenged. Even if there are shows that go beyond the family dramas of stiff patriarchies, for example shows about women's liberation or independent women, they can't help but not give in to the continuous urge to package the show for mass consumption in a globalisation-friendly nation-state, where the 'modern, yet traditional woman' manages the professional with the personal or the domestic and becomes an active consumer in the economy (Niyogi De 2012).

The content and broadcast practices of regional language television in India have also not been studied adequately. There are, at this moment, as many regional channels of Doordarshan as there are privately owned regional language channels. The representation of gender dynamics and roles on these channels are specifically to entertain the regional sensibilities of family and sub-nations. There is a strong need to document and analyse these texts as they are more prevalent in households than films and Hindi/English television.

For my study, I have chosen to look at Marathi television, particularly taking the case of a recently broadcast show '*Uncha Maza Zoka*,' (henceforth UMZ) a 'period show/drama' describing the life of Ramabai Ranade after her marriage to Justice M. G. Ranade, both of whom are renowned social reformers of Maharashtra. I will start out by commenting on the evolution of Marathi television, followed by the justification of why I chose this show as well as the prediction of why a serial on Ramabai Ranade, adapted from her writings, is feasible or profitable to produce commercially at this point of time. I will then elaborately talk about the content of the show, using illustrative examples from some selected episodes. UMZ has over 420 episodes. I have chosen to study the first 15 episodes of the show, since they set the tone of the show, introduce the characters, and establish its feel-good factor and its 'saleability'. In addition to that, I have also chosen 3 episodes at random and 3 episodes towards the end of the show to observe the shaping up of the narrative. Since I also aim to go beyond the content analysis of these episodes, I will mention my observations as I have watched other visual/textual material related to the show. For example, two months after the last episode of UMZ, the channel came up with a 2 hour long awards show based on the series, in which women achievers were congratulated

and honoured. I have also come across the interviews of the lead actors given on an entertainment based news programme that show their views on playing historically relevant characters. I would like to state in the beginning itself that I have watched this show (very infrequently) since it started airing, and I have unintentionally been a participant observer amongst people who watch this serial regularly. Though I would not generalise based on this observation, I would write it into this study along with expressing my discomfort and issues with the show and its representation of a process of women emancipation.

Charlotte Brundson (1993) mentions in her work on television/media studies and feminist scholarship that especially while studying television, the feminist scholar and the female viewer are pitted against one another, creating a power relation between the two, where one has the capital and resources to study the other. I am interested in this politics and would like to be alert and reflective about it while doing this study.

A Brief History of Marathi Television – Evolution and Practices

In the neoliberal era, it is not just by coincidence that you see the growth of regional-language television on one hand and the aspiration to be accepted at a global level on the other. Especially in a multilingual society like India, the principle of narrowcasting and tailoring narratives of local progress works to establish a positive consent from the local people; not just Marathi people in Maharashtra but elsewhere or even in the Marathi speaking diaspora in foreign countries (Niyogi De, 2012).

While Regional Language Television is relatively young in India, Marathi- language broadcasting started a bit earlier than the rest. From 1972 to 1984, Doordarshan had slots for Marathi language broadcasting, ranging from half an hour to three hours. Anupama Rao (1995) has analyzed a show called *Paulakhuna*, which was aired on 'Bombay Doordarshan' in 1993. *Paulakhuna* was a series based on 6 famous novels written by Marathi authors in the pre-Independence era, a time when social reform was a project taken up by many educated middle-class Brahmins. The producers of the show introduced the show as "...the evolution of Maharashtrian womanhood as depicted in the literary writing from the 19th through the 20th century" (Rao, 1995:521). Since my paper also talks about what televising a historical narrative into a contemporary serial does to the progressive nature of the narrative, I am borrowing a lot from her study. Like her, I am also curious about the politics of broadcasting stories of the

improved status of Marathi women. I am interested in the questions that Rao (1995) raises with regard to this type of Marathi TV programming:

At first glance, Paulakhuna does indeed seem configured as yet another exemplary progress-narrative. It is this to some extent: I will later argue that the serial gives the category 'woman' a narrative fullness through the delineation of a progressively evolving feminine 'self'. Initially, my interest in the serial was sparked by what I saw as the convergence between the realm of televisual culture and the arena of history (as a specialized academic discipline with its own discursive modalities) that Paulakhuna seemed to map; at least as far-as narratives about women were concerned. I was intrigued by the contemporaneity of Paulakhuna with the current historiographical interest in social reform.' How was it that the question (drama, really) of the brahmin, middle class woman's improvement was enacted (in the serial) with the same teleological fervour and ventriloquial skill that characterized the debates of the social reformers? (Rao, 1995: 521)

In 1994, Doordarshan inaugurated a separate Marathi channel named DD Sahyadri in 1998. DD Sahyadri was one of the more popular channels of Doordarshan, as it had one representative from each genre, a cookery show, a family drama, a Women's talk show, a comedy show, and so on. In fact the most memorable show for many people, even for those in living in the state of Maharashtra who didn't speak much Marathi but didn't have satellite television, was *Damini* in which a print media reporter's (Damini played by Pratiksha Lonkar) professional life is described along with bits and pieces of her personal life. After a few years, the protagonist even dies in one of the incidents, (and doesn't come back to life unlike how it happens in a few hit Hindi serials). After her death, the show takes a leap and showcases the story of her daughter Divya who becomes a cop and continues her mother's legacy of playing her role in keeping justice. The show, with its evocative and almost angrily sung title song, spoke about women doing jobs other than what the domestic demands of them and doing them with intense passion and ambition. After *Damini*, there were very few shows with a female cast in the lead role.

In 1999, the first private Marathi channel was started by the Zee Network, first named Alpha Marathi and later, Zee Marathi. By 2008, Marathi had 6 entertainment channels of its own. It also had four news channels, one 24x7 music channel and one movie channel. The Marathi television industry had grown big and in 2011, even 'Balaji,' the biggest production house of Hindi television made its entry into Marathi households with Marathi entertainment.

The largest component of Marathi TV is composed of the family dramas, from the old ones like *Gharkool*, *Vaadalaat*, *Chaar Divas Sasuche*, *Ya Gojirvanya Gharat*, *Asambhav*, *Agnibotra*, to the ones on air right now: *Mala Sasu Havi*, *Honaar Soon Mi Hya Ghar Chi*, *Devyani*, *Pudhcha Paul* etc. All these shows are about upper middle class or upper class royal families with surnames like Deshmukh, Pathwardhan, Raje-Shirke, Ratnaparkhi, Sardeshmukh, Tipre, Vikhe-Patil etc. This clearly shows that these shows are made keeping the 'upper' caste middle-class Marathi (only the forward-looking, urban, culturally and economically groomed people from Western Maharashtra) people in mind, either as characters and protagonists or as target audience.

Interestingly, at the same time while UMZ is airing on Zee Marathi, its rival Star Pravah is also airing another show which is loosely based on a similar storyline (child marriage of a charming Marathi girl into the family of social reformers) though it does not make any claim of being based on real historical characters. It would be a promising possibility to watch these shows and spot the similarities, wonder why they are both being produced at the same time and also notice that both of them give similar disclaimers at the start of the show.

Uncha Mazha Zoka

Uncha Mazha Zoka, which literally means 'high is my flight' (here the flight refers specifically to that experienced on a swing), is a prime time show with a storyline set in the late 19th century Maharashtra, and based on a book written by Ramabai Ranade called *Aamchya Aayushyathya Kaabi Aathvani*.

The sets for the show, presenting the houses and interiors resembling that era are constructed at Film City, Goregaon. Erected on 30-50 thousand square feet area, the set is mainly designed as per descriptions of Ranade Wada as written by Ramabai Ranade. The director of the show Viren Pradhan had also roped in a famous historian to ensure authenticity of the narrative.

Briefly the story of Uncha Maaza Zhoka can be narrated as follows. 11 year old Yamuna Kurlekar who lives with her parents in a small village in Satara district is very innocent and naïve, as children generally are. Madhavrao Ranade is a 33-year-old widower, living in an ancestral *wada* in Pune and is a “*nava-mata-waadi*” (progressive/reformist) and a learned man (district judge) from an affluent family of Ranades. After her marriage to Madhavrao, Yamuna’s name is changed to Rama and she tries hard to be the responsible newly-wed looking after her husband's

needs as she was by her mother. Madhavrao considers it as his responsibility to make the charming little Yamuna understand the importance of education. However, since his family believes that the education of women can potentially harm everyone in the family in all kinds of ways, the husband-wife duo has to struggle to take their project forward. When Madhavrao dies, Ramabai continues his legacy and becomes a well-known social reformer herself—Ramabai Ranade.

What is so special about the Ranades?

There have been many social reformers in Maharashtra in the pre-independence period, both male and female. What makes it feasible and profitable to make a TV show based on the lives of Ramabai Ranade (1862-1926) and Justice M. G. Ranade (1842-1901)? Is it as simple and coincidental that the show was made just because the director, Virendra Pradhan happened to read Ramabai's memoir (mentioned above) and got inspired? We need to ask whether similar shows are possible on the small screen, which is heavily dependent on advertising, based on other leaders such as Savitribai Phule, Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922), Anandibai Joshi (1865-1887)?

Let us try to answer this question with more questions. Reform could refer to two things: “...attempting to generate internal change in society, and attacking it from the outside” (Kosambi, 1991). While there was Ramabai Ranade, who followed the footsteps of her husband, and after his death, ran the Seva Sadan in Pune keeping the traditional role of women as supporters, good wives, service of others alive, there was also Pandita Ramabai who advocated self-reliance for women by vocally discarding given notions of womanhood and especially those of Hindu womanhood by converting to Christianity. The question I raise here is – Does the story of Ramabai Ranade make better TV to cater to a society, which calls itself both progressive and traditional at the same time, as compared to a show on Pandita Ramabai?

If the motive of the serial was to talk about women's education, could they have not taken stories of Savitribai Phule or Anandibai Joshi? The Ranades were Chitpavan Brahmins who were known to have a huge ideological influence in politics, journalism, education, literature, medicine etc. even though they were a small community (Kumar, Hatekar, and Mathur 2009) Savitribai Phule and her husband Jotiba struggled intensely against the caste-Hindu society in both word and deed by writing against it, and teaching girls and untouchables. They were more in favour of the

British rule than the rule of caste Hindus. Their patriotism was always in question, unlike that of the Ranades. Moreover, Savitribai's struggle cannot be easily sanitised. A scene of her being called a whore and pelted with stones (for her grit to teach girls and untouchables) on the streets of 19th century Pune, is difficult to capture on the small screen and broadcast on a prime time family slot. Similarly, it would be difficult to narrate the tale of Anandibai Joshi, the first ever woman to go to the United States to become a doctor, as her husband abused her physically, mentally, verbally, and sexually if she did not study English and get educated. Sexual violence was a big part of the story of her 'emancipation', which was conveniently ignored even in the popular of the history of Maharashtra and the psyche of its people, to say nothing of a probable TV adaptation.

The Framing by the Small Screen

Any story, be it fictional or non-fiction when adapted to a medium like television tends to get framed in specific ways to meet the needs of the markets and advertisers. Tagore's celebrated feminist dance drama *Chitrangada*, which questioned both heteronormativity and nationalism, when was made into a TV show directed by Piyali Basu, lost its reflexive and critical character, especially at its climax, even if it was choreographed to show the strength of a woman. His poem *Sadharan Meye*, sensitive of gender roles, was also televised and rather than critiquing the expectations from a traditional Hindu girl in a Bengali family, the adaptation assures the viewers of the girl's cultural rootedness and moreover this is only because she establishes her autonomy by cooking and setting up a professional kitchen.

Similarly, *UMZ* is not just about Ramabai Ranade's life, it is also about providing entertainment in some form or other. Viren Pradhan, the director of the show, says in an interview with the *Marathi Daily Loksatta* available on YouTube that what he wanted to depict more than the social reform was the lovable romance between Ramabai and Mahadevrao. He adds that though it was a child marriage, no viewer of the show has ever expressed any discomfort regarding the romantic scenes. He further explains this romance as 'worship' and finds it extremely romantic how Ramabai literally grounded herself in her room for a year after his death. The irony here is that after the death of the character of Mahadevrao, *UMZ* runs only for another week, and all the work Ramabai does after his death is reduced to a couple of episodes!

Another space that becomes a site for the director to make a 'serial' or a '*maalika*' is the kitchen of the Ranade Wada. The director, in the same YouTube video interview, mentions that though it might seem as if so many kitchen scenes imply that I am falling into the trap of making a conventional serial, "...it is not untrue that when 5 women coexist in a house or a kitchen, *bhandya la bhandi laagelach* (utensils will clank, or fights are bound to happen)." Ramabai Ranade herself has written in her work how there is a tension amongst women themselves and it is women who keep resisting change (Chakravarty 1993).

Content – Representation

I have divided my analysis of the politics of representation in UMZ into several themes and I wish to illustrate my observations with existing theories and examples from the show.

Thresholds and Households: Brahmanical Patriarchy

Since the beginning of the show, UMZ represents womanhood of a specific kind, that of 'upper' caste Hindu women. The girls, the '*suashinis*', (the married ones) and the widows were shown in restricted spaces with restricted body movements. To keep social systems of graded inequality like the caste system alive, a society needs the compliance of the 'upper' caste women. There needs to be some sort of a sexual control over their bodies to ensure caste purity, and even ancient Brahmanical texts talk about these women as objects of moral panic and suspicion. So on one hand, they are treated differently than men in terms of education, property rights, sexual liberation, etc., while on the other they get to be superior in the caste hierarchy than women of lower castes (Chakravarty 1993).

Childhood and Child Marriage

In the first set of episodes, Yamuna's (i.e. Ramabai's) childishness is shown as her most charming trait, apart from her kindness. She is good to everybody, the British officer, the poor, the Dalit servant, etc. even if it annoys and worries the elders. Before her marriage she is trained by her mother to be a good woman and a good wife. Her mother teaches her how to perform nurturing tasks like nursing someone with the knowledge of Ayurveda that she got from her father. When she is arranged to be married into a big household, her mother tells her about how she has to grow up and accept her husband's happiness as well as his grief as her own. Since the sexual control of 'upper' caste females matters so much, the appearance of puberty makes her

'dangerous' and thus prepubescent marriages are preferred for girls within the Brahmins. When she marries a man 20 years elder to her, he slowly and patiently tries to reform her to become a demure, soft-spoken, submissive supporter/partner in his work. Most of the episodes in the first part of the series (when Ramabai is played by a child actor called Tejashree Wawalkar) form this as the central plot in one way or the other.

Widowhood and Widow Remarriage

UMZ is one of the few shows which enlighten the viewers about how widows in 19th century Maharashtra actually looked and how they were treated; they would be tonsured and they would cover their heads with the 9-yard plain red sari that they wore each and every day, without any jewellery. Intentionally or unintentionally, the show depicts what was their reality; they are kept in the house and are shown doing continuous labour, throughout, since it is also unpunctuated by childbirth (Chakravarty 1993).

Mahadevrao Ranade, one of the strongest supporters of widow-remarriage, couldn't marry a widow himself due to the pressure of his family. He could also convince his father to get his sister married, even though she is younger than him. Durga/Akkasaheb, was a widow living in their father's household. In her memoir 'Aamchya Ayushyachya Kaahi Athvani', Ramabai Ranade writes about how Durga was as brilliant and smart as his brother in their childhood, and later when she came back as the widow she was dominant as compared to other women. The show depicts a certain rivalry between the two, which is not mutual exactly but that Durga is jealous of Ramabai's status as a married woman. The depiction of widows as envious characters is kind of expected. The tonsure of a widow is to ensure the social and the sexual death of her existence. In the show, there is an episode where Durga is sent to an empty room with a barber who has come to tonsure her head and we hear screams on the screen, suggesting that she was sexually harassed by him. If there is anything that UMZ depicts truthfully it is the representation of widows and widowhood.

Maintenance of the Family Unit, and thus the Nation

One of the promotional stills of the show has a caption that reads, "*Lagna..jyamule tila ayushacha artha umajla*" i.e. "it is only after marriage, that she got to know the true meaning of life". Spruha Joshi, the actor who plays the elder version of Ramabai, also agrees with this in an interview on a news channel ABP Majha (available on YouTube). During the freedom struggle, having women and men who believed in producing and reproducing the traditional national family, was

important to build a nation or do nation-work. UMZ clearly wants to build not just the idea of the Indian nation but also of a Marathi nation. Whenever there are British characters in any episode, the Indian-ness of the Ranades, especially that of Ramabai is over-emphasised. In one of the episodes when Rama is anxious about her ability to communicate with the British family that is going to visit them, she is surprised to know that the British women have learnt a few Marathi words, as they were also eager to communicate. Their conversation is not merely about the Ranades' work, but specifically about 'Indian culture' and they ask, "Where is the kitchen" in Marathi and also keep their sandals outside the house in keeping with tradition. The reaction expected from the audience seems to be that of nationalistic pride and awe at how lucky and charming the Ranades were. UMZ also shows the struggle of the Ranades, who were soft-spoken people, with their families and how they kept relationships intact and yet did what they did. This sort of a representation is a comment on all those leaders of either the past or the present who question the basic concepts of family and the nation and attempt to upset the status quo. It signifies that such truly rebellious leaders will be rejected and conformist social reformers will always be chosen for such representations on television.

The 'Hero' that was Justice M.G. Ranade

The show carves a hero out of the character of Mahadevrao. He is an educated scholar and a 'nyaaymurti' (meaning judge, a very evocative term which demands respect) and thus his superiority in the household is further accentuated over his superiority from being a son or a man. All the women treat him as the benevolent ruler of the household. They, including his mother and Ramabai, ask him for permissions on some occasions and for forgiveness on others, and he grants it to them very kindly with an additional philosophical speech, performing his character as a man with not just a smart brain but also a big heart and a quest for justice. Sometimes it also makes one question whether UMZ is about Ramabai, or if it is about Mahadevrao enabling Ramabai to actualise herself? Actress Spruha Joshi says in an interview with ABP Majha (available on YouTube) that Ramabai was truly lucky to have found such a supportive husband in the 19th century. Even at the UMZ awards, women awardees kept coming on stage to thank their husbands who were supportive and without whom they would never have been able to aim high. This makes one wonder who the real protagonist is, especially since after Mahadevrao's death, the serial lasts only for about a week.

Orthodox Brahmanism vs. Progressive Brahmanism

In the time when India was under the British, a new kind of a Brahmanism emerged which wasn't as orthodox or as feudal as before, but it was Brahmanism nonetheless. Brahmins were now the educated, elite, modernised representatives of a broader Hindu community. UMZ also shows this conflict between '*karmath*' (orthodox) Brahmins and '*navamatavaadi*' (progressive) Brahmins. These conflicts are shown to mostly happen on the street, on topics like widow remarriage, idol worship, tonsure of widows, women's education, even untouchability. In one of the episodes, they show Ramabai's brother (who is heavily influenced by Mahadevrao) get into a fight with orthodox Brahmins because they abuse a Dalit man whose shadow touched them when he bumped into them on the street. To prove his reformist outlook, the progressive Brahmin man insists that untouchability is a lie and wrong and that he will go to the Dalit's house for dinner tonight, and it is taken for granted that the Dalit would be honoured to invite a Brahmin into his home. The progressive brother almost scolds the Dalit when the latter (shown as a dark, stout and a physically and emotionally weak man) says things like, "Why are you getting into fights for us, sir? We are small people." The way the scene represents Dalits and the large-heartedness of the progressive Brahmin reforms is problematic. Even though that is the way it might have been, what it does is that when such a scene is broadcast, it vindicates the 'upper' caste, upper middleclass urban perception that caste no longer exists and that our forefathers have done the reform for us and we do not need to do anything more.

Reception: Brahmanical Post-Feminism, Restored Nationalism and the Resulting 'Feel-Good'

To gauge the patterns and meanings audiences make in their minds about a show is a matter of presumptions and predictions, if one does not go and interview a set of diverse people. In this section, I would like to try and predict how such a TV adaptation will be received. Some of this prediction is based on the participant observation conducted while watching this show with members of my 'upper' caste, upper middle class family. The rest of it borrows from research articles on reception of content, blog pieces, informal discussions with friends and general theories about both media/television studies and women's representation in them.

The show is popular for many reasons other than it being about a historical character. Some people love it simply because it is not a typical serial or a family drama. One of my progressive friends also loves the show, and sits with her entire family when they watch UMZ, as she finds it

“...any day better than 'masala' K-serials”.¹ At that time, a blogger² wrote specially in the context of the UMZ awards, that he is pleasantly surprised to see a channel other than DD Sahyadri, which is fulfilling a '*samajik bandhile*' or a social responsibility.

So in a way, the fat well-fed lie/scam of the 'corporate social responsibility' that the neo liberal market boasts of, is fulfilled at the hands of shows like UMZ for the corporate that is Zee Marathi. And socially relevant shows find their audience as swiftly as 'masala' content does. In fact after a point, one begins to wonder, if something which is touted as being socially relevant, is in fact just another form of entertainment, since it gives you a kind of a 'feel good' massage about your progressive culture.

To talk more about this 'feel-good,' it is exemplified when the content of the show represents the reformists or the upper caste nationalists as forgiving, just, and kind men who have now dedicated their lives to correct the oppression carried out by their forefathers on both the Dalits and the womenfolk of their own community, as I demonstrated earlier in the episode where the Dalit man was rescued and coerced into a dinner by the progressive Brahmin man.

Personally, as a feminist who believes in the anti-caste movement, this 'feel-good' scares me and keeps me far from appreciating the show for the so-called progressive narrative. Having seen it in person on the faces of my own family, it makes me uncomfortable to look at their satisfaction. It is as if they are almost reassured about their glorious past where all the reforms, justice and equality were taken care of by their 'progressive forefathers'. To arrive at a more informed claim, I would need to extend this observation and research to people from various backgrounds, and validate or revise my argument.

I want to problematise the way post-feminism (meaning a stage where it seems that a certain equality between men and women has been achieved) tends to get articulated, so that now we can caricature men-hating feminists. Also the market can now target the newly independent young woman and make her feel-good about herself via the route of fashioning her body and mind in a particular way and pattern of consumption. This idea has arrived in the West, and even

¹ K serials refer to serials which are either produced by Ekta Kapoor's Balaji Telefilms or those similar to it. They are mostly family dramas with a certain typical set of themes and treatments.

² Jaydeep, "jd chi wadi." *Kshitija palikade Bharari Marnaara Uncha Maza Zoka Purskar*. November, 2013. Accessed at <http://jdchivadi.blogspot.in/2013/08/blog-post.html/>

in the nationalistic discourse of India, a certain kind of post-emancipation phase is visible and represented through the show. The assumption then goes like this: “Now that we have 'taken into account' the various struggles women leaders fought and how their male counterparts supported them, we are now free to think that there is a certain kind of equality achieved while we remember our progressive past.” I can imagine financially independent Marathi (upper caste or middle caste) women watching the show with their husbands/families and appreciating the show for its effort at helping us remember how we are better off, probably than the 'other' kind of families. This other might include those of other castes, classes, educational background and religious minorities like Muslims who are always attacked as backward especially in the context of women. Thus, this further intensifies the pride in one's culture and its dominance.

In one of the episodes of UMZ, a debate between the conservative father of M.G. Ranade and the 'upper' caste tuition teacher (who earns money for the family, though she assures that it is her husband who not just allows it but also advises her to do the same) about the consequences of women's over-education (meaning education more than that required for house work) and what it will mean to the society, seems like it is addressed to all independent women or feminists; the way they dialogue and look at the screen, it is almost like they are talking to today's women. This education vs. *sansaar* (in Marathi *sansaar* means world, but in this context it means marriage, happy married life, the husband's household and also if put crudely, the bed and the kitchen) debate is interesting and the conservative patriarch is able to create anxieties in the tuition teacher's head, which she then installs in Ramabai's head. She worriedly tells Ramabai, “What if women don't use this education properly? What if 100-150 years later, women use their education and start living like men? Won't that reduce the sweetness in the family life and lead to conflict and chaos?” Ramabai is shown worried, curious, and anxious of the future. What such a scene creates in the minds of the viewers is a big question in my mind. So is it that the 'feel good' about a progressive gender equality also accompanied with an anxiety about equality that's truly radical or that shakes the entire system of Brahmin Patriarchy?

Conclusion

The show UMZ has been successful in presenting some complex debates of the 19th century context and some of them are relevant even now. That much effort in writing dialogues of arguments and theories is not seen on TV these days. Even though that is worth appreciating,

what is saddening is that the show does not leave any scope to visualise a future, i.e. a time after Ramabai Ranade and the likes of her, when there will be more battles to fight for gender equality. Ideally, a show based on history shouldn't claim a full stop or a finished business, but should convey that there is still space for more history to be created. If the show had left some space to critically analyse the whole rigmarole of social reform itself, so as to both appreciate it truly and also to plan or conceptualise the next step towards equality of all kinds, it would truly be 'inspiring'. But the way television frames history and reduces this space makes the representation of women problematic. It also excludes other women from histories and from the set target audience, making the narrative of women's emancipation truly Brahmanical.

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