INTRODUCTION

The year 2000 invited channels like Zee TV, Star TV and Sony TV in the Indian culture industries; like any other Indian woman, I spent most of my leisure before the TV. My parents always warned me to be productive else, I would turn into a couch potato, I enjoyed the episodes and eagerly waited to watch the next, it was as good as an addiction. I had to proceed to Kuvempu University for my post graduation in English Literature, it obviously meant that, I had to bid goodbye to these serials.

My lecturers gave me a new outlook to study a subject in the literature classes. The lectures took me off my feet and got me totally involved in how entertainment was not just an entertainment, but had turned into an Industry. It was after these lectures, that all the TV advertisements, really made sense to me; as a part of a curriculum, we critically analyzed the regional movies and the impact it had on the masses.

Such critical analysis and discussion in the class rooms were really enlightening and thoughtful. We even analyzed popular Bond movies and the reasons behind their popularity. It was also a period where the serials were sold like hotcakes, especially “K” serials of
Ekta Kapoor. Balaji Telefilms had boomed into an entertainment industry.

‘K’ serials were the talk of the town. People kept on discussing them in parties, clubs, functions, get-togethers etc. The serials had a trendsetting impact on the viewers, they started buying saris and the other accessories; as it was seen on screen, the new trends like, Bachelor’s party, Hen’s party, return gift, Italian dishes like pizza’s, burgers had become popular. These serials had a new impact on the viewers. I had just finished my Post Graduation with a decision to pursue my higher studies, in Cultural Studies in order to fulfill my father’s dream. The channels like Zee, Star, and Sony TV and gave a new definition to entertainment and leisure. Serials revolved around women and the great Indian cultural heritage. Hence I thought of studying these serials as a text, and the impact these 20 minutes serial had on the viewers. With consistent encouragement from my parents, decided to take the topic “Women and Culture in the serials of Ekta Kapoor: A study”.
STATEMENT OF THE THESIS WOMEN AND CULTURE IN THE SERIALS OF EKTA KAPOOR: A STUDY

This study is about the utilization of ‘women and culture’ as the cultural content by the capitalists of the Indian Cultural Industries.

Limitation: This study is limited to the selected Serials of Ekta Kapoor.

This is a pioneering work taken up to kindle the thoughts of the reader.

This study comes under the purview of cultural Studies


It has been divided into eight major chapters revolving round ‘Women and Culture’.

The study highlights: Culture, Culture Industry, Women, Character Portrayal, Relationships Gender Bias, Dialogues, Costumes, Technology, Stereotypes, Mixed culture, Spectatorship.
Methodology: Observation.

The encoded scenes of the serials are decoded on the screen for the spectators. The difference between a spectacle and a spectator is discussed through observation method in this thesis. The source of study is taken from Wikipedia, YouTube, journals, books etc. This study helps all the research scholars of Popular Studies, Cultural Studies and Film studies. It gives a new outlook to the viewers and provokes their thoughts to discriminate between the right and wrong or good and bad. The study is an eye opener for the blind followers.

This thesis has used the serials themselves as the Primary Source with the help of a website www.youtube.com. The serials were repeatedly seen and downloaded from the websites for reference, each episode in the serials functions as a text. These texts are available on www.star.com, www.zeetv.com, www.sonytv.com, as maximum serials referred were telecasted on Star TV, Zee TV and Sony TV. Plots, sub plots, dialogues, costumes, sound system and camera have helped to a greater extent to turn the soaps into text, and use it as the primary source in the thesis.

Purpose of the study: The topic Women and Culture in the Serials of Ekta Kapoor is chosen as a study for the following reasons. The popularity of the serials and the changes they have brought in the life style of the society. The study emphasizes on the impact of the
serials on the culture of viewers. The study helps to understand how
the serials have emphasized on the Sociological and Psychological
changes happening in society. The main purpose is to study the secret
behind popularity of the serials and the taste of the viewers. Ekta
Kapoor’s serials have gained appreciation all over the world. The
content that is being produced by these content writers has drawn
attention on a large scale. This thesis will help the readers realize the
economics of Balaji Telefilms and its contribution to the nation. The
thesis also discusses how these soap operas have brought changes to
look back at the history of Indian Television and their popularity. The
thesis also discusses about the importance of relationships in the
cultural history of India. It also emphasizes on the character portrayal
in the serials. A clear cut demarcation of the triumph of the good and
the evil is highlighted. The thesis also helps the reader to analyze the
value based messages conveyed to the viewers. The serials promote the
existing stereotypes and also bring changes in these stereotypes. The
thesis highlights gender related issues in our society. The usage of
high Technology in Television industry is noticed; where a camera
speaks through its eyes. The thesis also relates the importance of
dialogues and costumes in the popularity of the serials. It focuses on
the new trends in society through mixed culture and also helps a reader
to distinguish between a spectacle and a spectator and the importance
of spectatorship in the popularity of Ekta Kapoor serials. The thesis helps to study how the serials serve as the literary text. The thesis helps to know how culture is used and modified by the culture industry according to its whims and fancies and how they are commercialized although they are mass deceptive. This thesis focuses on the entertainment channels turning into culture industry by turning culture into the cultural content and reproduced in the form of soaps by Balaji Telefilms. Indian culture, psyche and society are closely studied by these content writers. Hence they reproduce culture deceptively; the thesis reflects the interpretation of culture and its impact on the masses. The thesis also speaks of encashing culture, dreams and beliefs through culture industry.

Women are used as content and commodity in the serials. The culture industry has reproduced cultural content which revolves round Indian woman and her struggle within the four walls. The serials also describe the problems a woman faces in her outdoor ventures and how she regains moral stability to fight every obstacle that comes in her way.

The serials address gender related issues on screen; the thesis helps in analyzing how a woman’s character helps in sorting out her problems with the help of the pre planned script. A woman in the soaps is used as a product as the ultimate soap produced by the industry is
based on the content. Hence a woman’s chastity, motherhood, modesty, sacrifice and culture are turned into products by these culture industries. The thesis helps to know the impact of the serials on the spectator psychologically and sociologically. It is noted that the viewers are passive and they unconsciously relate themselves to the roles on screen, and satisfy their ego. When they see a hero fight against injustice, their heart jumps in excitement. They visualize themselves in the place of these characters in the episodes that reflect courtship and love. The thesis helps the viewer to differentiate between the character and themselves, it acts as a stress buster. These serials have led to several social changes in India, several night schools have been opened to educate the masses, girl babies are loved and female infanticide has been reduced, equality is encouraged, inter caste marriages are encouraged. The thesis helps to study how soaps are Social Reformers and Educators. It highlights the effective learning that takes place by the visual text. These serials throw light on human rights and ask the weaker sex to fight for their right through soaps; they also promote Indian family system and its importance. These serials signify the importance of the festivals and rituals to the younger generations. The youngsters learn a lot from the serials as new concepts directly enter into a cultural system through Television and its
Soap operas not only bring social reforms but they also educate people on culture, law, marriage, festivals, cleanliness, modernity etc.

The lay out of the thesis is as follows

The first chapter highlights on culture, culture industry and women. The definitions of culture right from the Vedic age including the Hindu code of conduct, introduced by Manu Shashtra, and different stages of life are discussed in detail. The relevancy to the customs, traditions, festivals, and rituals of Indian scenario in the serials of Ekta Kapoor are discussed. The transmission of culture as a social heritage from old generation to the present is showcased. The human ability to assign arbitrary meaning to any object, behavior or condition makes people enormously creative. They readily distinguish culture from animal behaviour. It can be understood that culture differs from place to place and from community to community. There are three main subtitles in this chapter. The origin of culture industry in India, the contribution of Balaji Telefilms, and different modes of entertainment through the TV channels, a brief about the various serials, selected for the study are explained. The third subtopic throws light on the status of women since pre Vedic times. The changing scenario of the women’s life and the challenges faced by her till date are highlighted. An analysis of the serials of Ekta Kapoor with reference to culture and women in the serials selected for study are highlight with illustrations.
This chapter focuses on Indian culture and its great cultural heritage, it also involves the projection of Indian culture in fragments in soap operas; the chapter discusses in detail on the term culture and the ideologically governed society.

There are topics which give a brief description about the factors influencing culture for example: Geographical factors, Mythological Factors, the Impact of diversity on culture, Impact of the yugas’ (eras), and the invasions on Indian culture by the foreigners are discussed. In addition to it comparison of the ancient and the present culture along with their adaption in the serials are described. Another subtopic deals with impact of values on the serials and the findings of cultural features like sharing of culture, transmission of culture, its adaption and that the culture is cumulative and not stagnant. The concept of value based joint families are showcased in Ekta’s serials.

Most of the ‘K’ serials are social constructions of a woman, her family and her fight for dignity and equality. The serials present verities of women, to be specific, both modern and traditional. The dress code, hair style, language are traditional as well as modern. It resembles changes happening in the Indian metros. Every serial has two women standing opposite to each other with different social construction of each other. One represents the glorious tradition and
culture was as the other represents modernity and the upcoming cultural changes in society and its life style. One is value based and the other is valueless; the first one is financially dependent where as the later is independent capitally. The lady who is financially dependent lives with a joint family where as an independent lady lives all alone. This modern lady only believe in the survival of the fittest policy hence. She doesn’t epitomise ethics, values, tradition, and culture. Such women are presented as villains in the episodes. Their dialogues and body language create an image for them.

The second chapter deals with Character portrayal in the serials in detail. All the Soaps that are widely popular carry the same message; they are more about the moral conduct. Serials have been reflecting on the internal culture of the family, relationships and society. The serials represent Indian rituals and customs, reflecting the importance of each and every relationship. The chapter emphasizes on the role play of the various characters, mother, mother-in-law, father, father-in-law, siblings, and daughter-in-law and so on. All these characters are analysed as positive or negative characters based on their conduct and values imbibed by them.

The third chapter ‘Relationship’ is defined, described, and discussed through selected serials and their depiction of relationships on screen is explained in detail. Their impact on the huge crowds is
highlighted. The chapter also discusses the main cause for the increases in the TRP rates as they show case the importance of relationships and the bondage. The stress is laid on the joint families, of the Gujaratis’ the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law syndrome is highlighted with the illustrations. Sibling rivalry and avenging attitude is exposed. Society is a large institution of different kinds of relationships, while family is a small unit of multiple relationships.

The fourth chapter deals with Gender Bias the status of women in the society right from the Vedic age to the present age is discussed with relevance to the serials of Ekta Kapoor. Women in India have suffered because of the inequality that has existed for all these years in this society. It is very evident that, there is a lot of discrimination between the male and the female folk. From North to South, from East to West the status of woman does not change and the same is reflected in all the serials with subtle changes in Indian society. Since age’s woman is taught to cook, clean, take care of babies, husband, and the in-laws, hence her parents curb her whenever she tries to question or revolt and the punishments are severe so that, she may never think of questioning or revolting again. Woman has been portrayed as a person born, only for sacrifice and to serve others like an unpaid slave. The issues like discrimination in the family, marriage, profession, education, the rights and duties of women as a daughter, sister, wife,
mother, daughter-in-law, and sister- in- law and of course the dominant mother-in-law have been discussed.

The fifth Chapter shows a study of dialogues, costumes and technology. Dialogue is the subtopic in this chapter. The commonly used dialogues of all the serials are highlighted. It is a literary and theatrical form, its history traces back to the narrative and didactic types that are found in classical Greek and Indian literature; particularly in the rhetoric art. Dialogue as a genre dates back to Sumerian disputes of Japan and Rig-Veda to Mahabharata. Plato introduced the systematic use of dialogues as an independent art form to the westerners. He simplified the meaning of dialogue to pure argumentative conversation.

The costumes designed for a daughter, mother, wife, and a woman in general represent the culture and accordingly the function of clothes is to protect the modesty of women. According to scriptures every little thing connects a woman to her culture. For instance, the ‘sindhoor’ that she applies is for her husband’s long life and the ‘mangala sutra’ is an auspicious chain. This traditional practice seems to be broken in fragments because of the influences and changes that are happening in huge masses because of trade and the media.
Costumes have always spoken about self, culture, social and financial status and identity to a certain extent. Costumes are simple, grand and beautiful doing the same job of covering one’s body. Artists have used costumes to make their work of art look beautiful. Characters half the time look beautiful because of their costumes and help the writer to describe a character of his play\ novel\ or any other work of art.

Technology has been considered as one of the subtopics in the Fifth chapter. Invention of Television was a result of series of inventions which involved incredible efforts. Advanced developments in photography led to motion pictures and the colour pictures along with the audio. Video and audio together resulted into a Television. The first of its kind was black and white next was the colours and attracted a lot of attention in the market.

As most of the target viewers are women, the social construction of a serial revolves around women; men individually believe that women represent delicacy, an object of desire and must take care of the house hold chores, but this is a biased social construction that is instilled in the minds of the people ever since the evolution of the society.
The sixth chapter deals with the Stereotypes. The collective stereotypes that have been existing in our society are used by the directors and they also have shown the changes that have been happening culturally in the country. A lot of existing stereotypes are presented to a set of audience that strongly believes in religious rituals, where women are not allowed into the temples assuming that women are impure, along with such rituals, there are social changes that a serial presents to the viewers. Most of the serials project women in Western clothes and men involving themselves in cheap acts show that the younger generations have drifted away from their roots; both men and women are given equal importance and most importantly a few serious social issues such as fighting for women’s dignity, empowerment, equality, widow remarriage and divorce. Social equality is very common in serials. The scenes that focus on the boss employee relationship also exhibit equal treatment, both girls and boys of the serial are educated and are treated equal.

The chapter discusses the types of stereotypes, and the stereotypical examples in case of Inter caste Marriages, education, dress code, rules and regulations of the society

The seventh chapter highlights Mixed Culture. The Indian versus Western culture depicted in the serials are analyzed. This includes the way of living, eating habits, daily duties, entry of
modernity, hanging on to the orthodox beliefs, the tussle between the old traditions and the new trends and so on. Inter-caste and inter-religion marriages have been promoted in the serials. Inter-caste marriages, love marriages, inter-religious marriages are an outcome of the prevailing mixed culture. The study also projects the problems of love marriage and its acceptance by the family shown in the serials.

The eighth chapter discusses the Impact of serials on spectatorship. This chapter defines spectatorship, who is a spectator, what is a spectacle, the uses of spectatorship and the impact of spectatorship on the culture industry. The impact of serials on a spectator is discussed with the illustrations from the selected serials.

Spectator is a person, who looks at the spectacle. The spectator may look at a spectacle with various reasons, and it is an observation of an act and its registration into the cognition. For instance, the beautiful ladies and the handsome men playing various roles in Ekta Kapoor’s soaps. The characters are a spectacle as they draw attention of the public to their looks. The actors must draw attention for their acting but a spectator is not willing to judge character acting but is admiring his/her personality, dialogue delivery and makeup.

The birth of the concept spectator and spectatorship took place after French revolution where the masses had been observing the political change and its impact on the common folks which has been
studied by Althuser with the Ideology apparatus. ISA acts mainly on a spectators mind, his outlook to any spectacle will be totally based on a person’s accepted ideology. Indian prime time soaps are based on ideologies, the characters and the script of the serial are a spectacle; as both of them together draw the spectators’ attention. These ideologies are closely associated with faith and belief of the masses. Indian prime time soaps and the other soaps are family oriented, promoting the importance of moral values practiced in the name of culture.

Ekta Kapoor’s soaps are based on joint families, which, easily demonstrates a fact that, it is a family show. ‘K’ series have innumerable admirers because the script of the soap is in the regional language and the attire is regional too. The dialect of the soap first draws attention of the spectator. Next it is the beautiful ethnic dress draped around these middle aged Indian women with matching jewellery, most importantly the story line of the serial reflects a typical Indian middle class family and their struggle to make a best living. All the characters look stunning on screen; even though it is unrealistic the spectator would like to ignore that fact and look at their spectacle.

The thesis concludes with a Conclusion highlighting the assertions of the hypothesis. Conclusion is the epitome of the findings. Last but not the least is the Bibliography which has acted as the brain of this thesis.