CHAPTER: 2

CHARACTER PORTRAYAL

Character is a role played in a serial, drama or a movie. The portrayal of any character in any art form depends on the theme of the story, the director, the script writer, the actor and the producer. Man learns from several people, as a child, he learns from his parents, family, teachers, peer group, and society at large. The outcome of this learning is character. The philosophical and the metaphysical method of studying human mind were coeval with the age, in which configuration or sculpture reached its acme. It was also coeval with the creation of the greatest epics, some of the grandest dramas and most sublime orations known to man. The great metaphysicians of Greece- Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Thales, Pythagoras, and Anaximander, all believed in common method of investigating mind. Great teachers like Aristotle and Plato contributed their views on character. Aristotle called it “ethos” which means character as well as emotions and all together is a combination of positive or negative qualities in a man.

Character portrayal is an overall representation of a character in a work of art; say a story, novel, cinema, soap or a movie. Vedas, Panchatantra, Jataka tales, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, Shubhashitas and Bhagavat Gita are the literary works that throw light
on human behaviour; all the Soaps that, are widely popular carry the same message it is more about the moral conduct.

Human life is most of the times comprised of four important facts; Dharma, Artha, Kama and Moksha. Dharma; have several meanings: the law, righteousness, duty, morals and social order. Artha signifies the economy, Kama is desire in the broadest sense and all these three embrace human life in an Indian society. This concept has been instilled in the characters and the serials of Ekta Kapoor. Vishnu Sharma says;

"one sees with wisdom, not with the eye;
Conduct, not birth, is the mark of breeding;
Turning away from wrong is true learning"[1]

The lines are lucid enough to understand that, a person is more known by his conduct than his fame or lineage; different forms of conduct in different instances compiled together make a character.

The configurations involved in the making of a personality are values, language, behavior, community, religion, manners. An appropriate combination of all the above will lead to a personality. Characters are classified into, comic, tragic, heroic, romantic, lethargic, restless, optimistic, pessimistic, orthodox, conservative, reserved, socializing, jovial, and enthusiastic characters etc.

Ramayana and Mahabharata both voluminously describe different roles for instance, role of a son, brother, mother, father, sister,
wife, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law, brother-in-law, 
father-in-law, grandmother, grandfather, cousins, king, queen, slave, 
master, seer, labourer, dancer, carpenter, blacksmith, merchant, 
minister, beggar, etc there are several roles that have a message to the 
general folks. These epics have a great impact on the psyche of the 
people and they seem to be the crux of every Hindu family till date.

Code of conduct is the outcome of ethics and is influenced by 
Moral values that are instilled in a man and society. The concept of 
morality includes duties, obligations. Morality governs thoughts and 
conduct of people; it helps in distinguishing the right and wrong, good 
and evil. It is implied in both the personal as well as the professional 
front; it helps common people to lead a peaceful and disciplined life.

Character has been wisely projected in phrases like ‘brave as a 
lion,’ ‘mean as a jackal,’ ‘wise as an owl,’ ‘fast as rabbit,’ ‘slow as a 
tortoise,’ ‘vicious as a snake,’ ‘sly as a wolf,’ ‘loud as a crow,’ 
‘faithful as a dog,’ ‘hardworking as donkey,’ ‘quick as a horse.’

Analysis of Character Portrayal In The Serials:

Introduction of a character in the serial always focuses on the 
characters walking style, dressing sense, likes and dislikes hobbies, 
language, and their overall presentation. A positive character is 
introduced with good background music, the cameras first focus on the 
walk, then on his eyes, smile, hair and the last focus is on the face.
Similarly when a negative character is introduced, the background music indicates cunningness and cruelty, gait is dramatic, looks are modern but the body language and speech completely reflects the wickedness of the character. When Gomzy and UD are introduced, they are totally Western. They address their elders with their names as Mr. Bajaj and Tulsi; which is against Indian culture. The youngsters must talk to their elders with respect and dignity. Both of them are dressed in casuals, with a cap, a pierced eye brow, jelled hair style and lots of arrogance.

A cultured girl is portrayed lighting a lamp, or helping an aged couple cross the heavy traffic roads, or riding a bicycle, with matching bangles, ear rings and an ethnic dress. With pleasant back ground music, she is either cooking or cleaning the house. One common thing in character portrayal on screen is the camera focusing on the face only in the end to increase the curiosity of the viewers.

Body Language: Body movements reflect the thoughts of a person: for instance, when a person ‘shrugs his shoulder’ it means that, the person is not willing to take up the responsibilities. The characters in the serial create a first impression through their body movements. For example, in the Serial ‘Kahani Ghar Ghar Ki’ Shruti is portrayed as a lazy goose, the camera is focussed on her movements, where she is unwilling to wake up and rush to her school. Parvathi is portrayed to be pious,
generous, humble, strict, and active, all these qualities are portrayed in
the initial episodes, and the episodes begin with a prayer and a family
gathering. Anger and hatred in a character are very well focussed in the
serial Kutumb. In a party, Pratham expresses his anger by crushing a
glass and hurts his palm. There are episodes in all the serials; where a
character walks out in anger, runs away crying, screams out of fear,
jumps in happiness, hugs in excitement, bites his teeth in anger, etc.
Such emotions are clearly portrayed through body language in the
serials.

Body language of a character portrays character of a person, his
likes and dislikes to the viewers. When the characters are portraying
shock, the immediate body language noticed is that the shocked person
faints, gets a heart attack, pooja plate falls down, characters faint and
collapse. Such episodes gain a lot of TRP (Television Rating Points)
and appreciation from the viewers. Body language helps the spectators
to analyze the characters and creates a variable impression of the
characters. Body language is a significant component in acting; the
selected movements are portrayed as per the director’s interests.

CLOSE – UP like ‘raising an eyebrow’, ‘winking an eye’,
‘raising both hands high’, small curvature in lips, a nasty look, a
wicked smile, cameras focus intentionally on these facial expressions
to read a characters mind in the serial and it is rightly said that ‘the
face is the index of mind’. Tulsi, Prerna, Parvathi, Archana and Kashish are very expressive. And the same fact has been encashed in the serials of Ekta Kapoor.

Archana’s tears reveal that she is sober and is hurt; Tulsi’s smile tells that she is trying to cover-up something very important. Prerna’s grim look reflects that she cannot be fooled. Similarly all the characters portray the feelings according to need of the hour in scene.

A curling of the lip, an arching of the eyebrows, widening or narrowing of the eyes, a sob, a sneer, a laugh, glaring look, arrogant looks, looks expressing delight and frustrations speak volumes without any speech. A story helps to identify different expressions through a very good narration too.

Facial expressions portray a character at the superficial level and these expressions can absolutely be deceptive as well as reliable but these do reveal the momentary truth of a person. For instance, in a scene Tulsi reveals the secret of her pregnancy to Savita (mother-in-law), the immediate reaction captured is the horrifying look; which is soon covered with the smile to hide her true feelings.

Ekta Kapoor’s serials have portrayed characters by capturing both the first expression which is a reality and the second expression is false. Understanding and categorising a character into groups like good, evil, cultured, uncultured etc is easy because the camera’s eyes
catch both the feelings and the same is decoded by the viewers. Most of the directors focus on the facial expression and then their body movements, as they catch the expressions and feelings like love, anger, hatred, conspiracy, fear, agony, happiness etc. Hence facial expressions describe the character and his intentions in the serial.

As the directors focus on the facial expression, it’s not necessary to verbally communicate; what a character is actually going through. It is said that ‘truth always reflects in ones eyes’. Hence, facial expressions and their impact create an accurate impression of the character on screen.

A few episodes work on the romantic scenes of a courtship, the couple communicates to each other only with expressions, they are completely speechless, and melodious Bollywood lyrics are played in the background to present an enchanting effect on the viewers. Such episodes are common in all the serials of Ekta Kapoor.

Actions speak louder than words: Deeds portray a person’s character and leave an impression on the viewer; in Ramayana, Rama represents righteousness where as Ravana represents ego. It is the deed that marks a difference between the two. Tulsi is portrayed as the ideal daughter-in-law where as Mandira is presented as a vicious lady. The character ‘Tulsi’ is a common expectation of every mother-in-law; it never materializes in the real world. She represents the true culture of
India. She has played various roles in the Virani Parivaar and each role is ideal.

Tulsi, being a small town girl is very simple in nature and aspires for the best companionship; she serves the elders, cooks tasty food, and knows to perform sacred rituals and traditions. She is represented, different from others because she knows the significance of each and every ritual and tradition that is being followed by the members of the family. She is very humble, polite, honest, and jovial. She has a solution to every problem. She is broadminded and social. She is educated but prefers family to her profession. She believes in values and often proves to be a woman of principles.

Tulsi as beloved is true to her relationship till the end of the show, in spite of several leaps and bounds. Mihir likes her modesty, principles, and values and decides to marry Tulsi instead of Payal. Mihir compares Payal with Tulsi and feels that Payal is not the right person, as his life partner. Payal gives more importance to her carrier and business and she is of the opinion that family can be looked after by maids and other members of the family. Tulsi as a wife is very sincere, honest and hard working. A typical Indian wife is represented through her character; she cooks breakfast and serves, irons clothes, gives him his wallet and hanky while he is leaving to office, prays,
faests, and waits for him. She obeys his orders and looks after his family, acts as a counsellor, friend, and guide.

Tulsi as mother: Her character portrayal is close to reality; she instils her values, in her children and teaches them to follow the great Indian tradition. As daughter-in-law she tries to help her mother-in-law and respects her, and serves her but there are episodes where she fights for her dignity against her mother-in-law. She also wins appreciation from her mother-in-law in a few episodes; where her mother-in-law plays the role of her mother. Such episodes make the viewers believe that a daughter-in-law and a mother-in-law relationship will be the best if both of them make a few compromises.

Tulsi as a mother-in-law is projected as a mother to her daughters’-in-law and stands by them in their difficulties. They share a friendship amongst them and feel relieved. There is an adage ‘if wealth is lost nothing is lost but if character is lost then everything is lost’ This holds good with Ajith a character from the serial Pavitra Rishta was a transformed man after the losses he incurred in his business. He started working with Manav in his business, because of misunderstandings created by Shibu; Manav loses trust in Ajith; which results into complications later.
If a person loses his character and trust then it will be a great task to regain it. Serials of Ekta Kapoor are mainly focussed on code of conduct; in a society where moral values are absent with the chancing situations. A character may be transformed based on the influences, for instance, in the serial Kyun Ki Saas Bhi Bahu Thi Gautam’s entry in the serial represents him as a brute, unmannered, immature, and totally uncultured. He is found ragging college students and teasing them. Tulsi meets her son for the first time in the police station; as she had lodged a complaint against Gautam for ragging girls. In the following episodes there is a gradual transformation in Gautam’s behaviour.

Most of the Soaps, show a gradual transformation in the characters. Payal’s avenging attitude, slowly changes to forgiveness, accepts Shobha as her daughter-in-law and turns out to be a very good friend of the Virani’s. Some other characters like Karan and Goutam change from negative to positive and vice versa. Ajith from Pavitra Rishta also falls under the same category. There is a slow transformation in Ajith but seems to be temporary for the situations do not let him to be a reformed man and his attitude forces him, back to square one to represent tyranny.

In the serial Kayamath, Aisha had been aware of the fact, that her father was a coward, and was mainly responsible for all the
atrocities; she takes revenge on Prachi. Aisha believes that, she could teach her father a lesson by hurting Prachi; who happened to be her father’s rightful inheritor. Milind hates this society, because of the existing inequality. He genuinely questions the class and caste in the society. He develops grudge and hatred towards the society and only aims to be a millionaire and take revenge.

Speech and Intonation: Character’s state of mind is analyzed on the basis of tone and intonation of the person. Identification of the pitch as high and low is based on emotional quotient shared. Language is the only medium that gives an over view of a character, person, situation, relationship or a story. Character is very important factor in life. It stands as a threshold for the development of all the other relationships.

A person is superficially judged by his speech, the characters of the serials can be categorized based on their speech, and Archana is soft spoken where as her mother-in-law keeps quarreling. Similarly a character’s ego and overconfidence can be judged by the tone of the speech. Wit, irony, satire can be clearly understood only through modulation of voice. Popular characters are softly spoken, very diplomatic and commanding when they fight for truth. Characters, like Payal, Savita Thai, Manju, Ajith, and Dharmesh have used their tongue only for their profit.
The language used by these characters reflects their attitude on screen; which is either positive or negative, characters like Rasika, Savita, Dharmesh, Ajith, Manjusha, and Varsha from Pavitra Rishta expresses their attitude in the speech. These characters express selfishness in their speech. Savita is known as a fighter cock in her chawl because of her sharp tongue and uncontrolled anger where as Archana and Manav from Pavitra Rishta are soft spoken. Character’s speech can either be consoling, soothing, irritating, taunting, commenting or trigger a fight among two people. Speech and tone of the character either create happiness or grief.

Positive Characters : In Pavitra Rishta, Archana is a representation of an ideal daughter, sister, wife and daughter-in-law. She sacrifices her education to support her family and her sick mother. She does not argue, or crave for luxuries. She is very simple and beautiful, sharing and caring. Archana is fair, tall and beautiful but not educated enough to earn a living. Many bridegrooms reject her because she was not employed.

Archana is God fearing, modest and cultured. She too lives in a chawl with her middle class family. Her father is a retired ex service man, her brother and sister-in-law work for the family. She has two younger sisters both educated. Archana had all the qualities of a typical Indian woman but nobody wanted to get married to her; as she was not
a working woman. After marriage her mother-in-law ill treats her but Archana’s principles do not let her argue. Her values and modesty impress Manav and both of them share a beautiful husband-wife relationship. She is portrayed as a very good daughter-in-law, sister-in-law but destiny wanted something else from her.

Manav is a mechanic and lives in a chawl with a younger brother, sister, mother and an artist father. He is the only bread earner of the family, his father is addicted to hot drinks; hence his earning is not contributed to the family. He is portrayed to be principled, hardworking, and a tall, fairly wheatish handsome bachelor with an empty wallet. He believes in the concept of simple living and high thinking, aspires to lead a peaceful life. He loves Archana and wishes to marry her. It is very often said, that wealth must not be given greater importance as it is temporary and is not satisfying but, a man with no money is terribly ill treated in a society. Just as the lines go:

A man’s strengths might be grounded in justice
But if he has no money in his wallet,
He might provide good and faithful service
Yet his employer hates his guts;
His close kin leave him all at once,
High and dry; and his sons,
His own flesh and blood forsake him too;
Wife though nobly born
Grows cold and pays him no honour;
Good friends shun his very sight;
Virtues do not glow forth bright,
Miseries wax and grow apace. [2]
Manav is, no doubt a man of strengths, grounded in justice, like Tulsi of Kyun Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi both of them are the two important characters that face miseries in life because of the financial problems and their strong beliefs in values. Manav has been projected as the victim of poverty and society.

Manav though humble gets fed up with his poverty. He is terribly disturbed when his wife has a miscarriage; which could have been avoided, if his relatives would have helped him. Manav begs everyone but no body helps, this leads to a lot of pain and misery, dejected, he abandons his family. He meets with an accident, which, later turns out to be a boon in disguise. Manav is very humble, but, society kicks him hard. Preoccupied with the need of wealth, he leaves his country and the following stanza written by Vishnu Sharma suits such a situation. Manav settles in Canada as he wanted to forget all his grief.

“A man preoccupied by need for wealth  
Gives up values, forsakes his family,  
Abandons his loved one’s and the land of birth,  
Leaves his own place disadvantageous  
And quickly goes to foreign places. [3]

Ideal Sister : In soap Kahin To Hoga Kashish is portrayed as an ideal sister. She takes care of them just like a mother. Her four sisters respect her and obey her in the initial episodes. She is smart and works for a company to support the family. Her father is portrayed to be a humble
man; her father believes that good character and culture are the two assets that he has passed on to his daughters. Kasish is principled, middleclass, beautiful just like characters Tulsi, Parvathi, Om, Kamal, Karan, Nandini, Archana, Manava, Sulochana Thai, and the other good roles also reflect their goodness through their behaviour.

Characters like Shobha, Purvi, Teju, Ovi, Shruti and Karan have been identified as good. Characters like Gomzy, Prem, Karan, are also the ones whose characters vary because of the bad upbringing. Important characters like Prerna, Archana, Tulsi, Parvati, and Kasish all of them have a lot of parental influence in their doctrined life but challenges and circumstances were entirely different for all of them. Purvi and Shobha were much influenced by their parents. Their principles made them stand the ground in worst situations.

Negative Characters : Ansh stands for negative attitude. He uses people as tools to accomplish his selfish deeds. He is unpredictable and not trustworthy. He is a perfect example to quote that a man is identified by his conduct and not by birth. He is a gangster, loves playing with real weapons. He is portrayed as a beast; he is cunning, cruel and selfish.

Komolika is another character that exhibits a lot of negative thought in the serial ‘Kasauti Zindagi Ki’. Komolika is cunning, selfish, jealous, detached, coward, a complete package of a witch. She
kidnaps Prema’s son and takes her revenge, she is presented with loud makeup and gaudy costumes and cunning facial expressions. She loves money and gains it by hook or crook.

Payal is another character in Kyun Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi that played the negative role but there is a gradual transformation in her. She gets her son married to Tulsi’s daughter Shobha, both daughter-in-law and mother-in-law had their differences, but they resolve it. These are the few characters of the serial that represent wickedness as well as transformation of life in few situations. Mandira is a negative role, although a doctor by profession is not principled and value based in life. This attitude in her represents her as a bad mother and a woman. She not only cheats her son, husband but cheats herself. Pallavi is an Industrialist; still, she is cunning, selfish and fails to represent herself as a family person.

Characters like Manjusha, Dharmesh, Savita Thai, who do not realize the importance of the situation and always take advantage of the situation. Characters like Ansh, Payal, Mandira, Ayesha, Dharmesh, Varsha, Savita, Ajith, Manju etc very well have reflected their passivism and negativity through their obscene language. The characters that are described in Panchatantra are similar to these characters; human behaviour is varies. The lines given below speak of how the implication changes from person to person.
A king is ruined by bad advice:
An ascetic by company;
A child by fond indulgence;
A noble line by evil sons;
Virtuous conduct by serving the base;
Friendship from want of regard;
Investment by mismanagement;
Affection from long absence;
And a woman by drink;
Wealth through misdirected charity. [4]

For instance in the play Volpone by Ben Johnson the characters are masked as wolves, jackals, swans, rabbits, horses etc; the masked characters are personified and all reflect different types of characters; it is always said that not all fingers are alike and the idiom goes right in the study of character. People play different roles in different situations and they represent themselves in different roles. Characters like Mr. Bajaj, Karan, Gomzy, and Prem were portrayed as the rude ones, but then few important ladies of their life bring in remarkable changes in them by making them understand the importance of family bond.

Negative roles in the serials are women; dressed in sari but very grandly dressed with many ornaments and with dark coated lips, heavily colored eye lashes, mascara and varied forms of nail color and hair style. These negative characters when compared to the positive characters are more raucous, insensitive, and always add fuel to fire; where as the positive characters of the serials keep themselves engaged binding the relations in family. For instance, in all the “K” serials, the
characters that are playing a negative role are not born villains; circumstances force them to be so.

Gomzy, Prem, Sachin, Shruti, Teju, and Ovi are much influenced by the negative traits of their close relatives, Gomzy loses faith in relationships, as his parents did not spend time with him. Prem assumes Komolika to be the only relative of his life and is under her influence. He assumes that his parents and close relatives have been terribly harsh to his aunty and develops an avenging attitude. Teju, ovi, and Sachin are misled by their own grandmother.

Shruti though brought up by Parvathi, still had a terrible temptation to everything that invited trouble knowingly or unknowingly. She is the best character to prove that, parental influence alone does not mean everything but the other influential people of the family, also have their share of role to play. This society includes peer group pressure on the teenagers; Shruti of Kaahani Ghar Ghar Ki represents peer group pressure where Shruti is mislead by a few friends of hers. Anurag’s suspicious nature helps Komolika and his mother interfere in his matters and mess his life.

Conclusion : ‘K’ serials have tried to bring some social reforms among the masses by creating plots that discuss ‘issues’ related to a family, identity crisis and struggle for existence. Women’s right for a dignified life at home involves challenges. Asserting her right for
equality is projected in the soaps. Mega serials, which ran up to a
decade, portrayed the strong will of the woman characters in the
troublesome situations.

“K” serials portray family and its members and the interaction
between them. At times, these interactions turn into debates and
quarrels, love and humour. The concept of ideal characters is adopted
from the Epics Ramayana and Mahabharata. The characters of the
great epics are considered to be the role models of the common folks.
The existing difficulties of a family, each member is different with a
common identity. In serials like Kyun Ki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi
Kahaani Ghar Ghar Ki, Pavitra Rishta, Kasauti Zindagi Ki, Kashish
and Kutumb family values are given prime importance and each
character in the families represent the variety.

‘K’ serials portray characters of different types. Characters like
Tulsi, Archana, Parvathi, Kasish and Prerna are alike in some, for
instance; all of them are from middle class, love a principled life, and
are selfless, humble, and positive. Characters are the byproducts of the
writer’s imagination. Characters add color to the writer’s imagination.
They are involved in enacting writer’s imagination. Characters mould
the plot.

Cinemas and serials have gained popularity, because of the
characters and the way they are presented to the audience by the
directors who usually create a plot and characters. The director caters
to the viewers needs. Both the director and the scriptwriters create the
spectacle for a spectator.

Popular characters have won laurels; the plot of the drama is
thematically social. Favorite characters exhibit bold tackling of
common problems like eve teasing, identity crisis, male dominance,
rituals, and traditions. Just as the tag line goes for Star Television Ltd.
‘Rishta Wahi Soch Nayee’. Relationships in the serials are same but its
presentation is as per the want of the new generation. These characters
of the family drama are sacrificing, humble, selfless, polite, honest,
truthful, smart, and knowledgeable, they have sharp attractive features,
long nose, fair complexion, tall, beautiful cascade of hair, beautiful
eyes and most importantly they were matured enough to understand
everyone. Balaji Telefilms is successful in portraying the Indian
society; through the family drama, the drama addresses issues in the
Indian family.

END NOTE

1. Sarma Vishnu: Pancatantra; translated by Rajan Chandra, verse 95, Penguin
Books Ltd, pg 231 1993]
2. Sarma Vishnu: Pancatantra; translated by Rajan Chandra, verse 16, Penguin
Books Ltd, pg 402 1993]
Books Ltd, pg 409 1993]
4. Sarma Vishnu: Pancatantra; translated by Rajan Chandra, verse 125, Penguin
Books Ltd, pg 49 1993]