

ESSENTIAL CHARACTERS IN INDIAN SOAP OPERAS

TAHMID

Your typical Indian soap opera is a sophisticated medium of storytelling and home to a multitude of rich characters and ingenious narrative elements. Here are some staple characters you can expect when watching one.

THE SPINELESS HOUSEWIFE: This woman will do anything anybody tells her to do. If she doesn't, her family and her in-laws will gang up on her and tell her she's worthless and will never get a husband (even if she already has one). She is always in charge of food and has to prove herself in front of her in-laws. Any poisoned food and she will be the one to blame, even if someone else did it. The kitchen is her territory. If you don't find her there, she'll be the topic of the Debating Circle. If she poisons food, she'll be the topic of the Debating Circle.

THE ODDBALL: This person has something to separate him/her from "normal" people, perhaps an otherworldly accent, diminished mental capacity or a stunted posture. The Oddball is usually an out-cast and only loved by one guardian, the other wanted him/her dead at birth. However, the doting guardian is actually the manipulative one, and controls The Oddball's every move, such as poisoning the food prepared by The Spineless Housewife. You'll keep wondering why The Oddball is still alive as he/she receives multiple death threats each episode. It's never too late to get an abortion.

THE CHARMING HUSBAND: Who should you marry your daughter off to? We've all asked ourselves this question at one point and the answer is The Charming Husband. There are no faults to his personality, his face or anything else for that matter. Anything that can actually be held against him is The Spineless Housewife's fault instead.

THE MANIPULATIVE AUNT: These aunts don't really exist in real life, which is why soap operas are so much more interesting. They blackmail the emotionally weak, usually The Spineless Housewife or The Oddball. She is only an aunt and not a mother because her life-giving power has been sapped out from all the evil she holds within her.

THE HOUSE ELDERS: The House Elders are old crones and older men. They hold the Debating Circle every single episode to find out who poisoned the food cooked by The Spineless Housewife.

THE TATTLETALE STEP-SISTER: This

wench will go through hell and back to make The Spineless Housewife guilty of poisoning food. She will keep spreading rumours whether true or false. Nothing can get past her. She always competes with The Spineless Housewife to show that she can marry The Charming

receive their medicine late, would you? Even though she obeys The House Elders, she will become the judge, jury and executioner when trying to find out who poisoned the food. You wouldn't want The Bullet Slap, would you? Then stop poisoning food.

woman who isn't married is worthless) off to?

- Who took The Charming Husband's shaving kit?
- Should we sell off The Oddball to another family?
- Did you poison the food again?



THE BULLET SLAP: The scariest thing you can ever receive is The Bullet Slap from The Mother-Lord. These will hurt more than bullets because they are laced with humiliation. The Mother-Lord practises this on The Guard/Servant off screen every day in his shack outside the house when they're alone together, which is how she harnessed this immense power. If The House Elder or The Manipulative Aunt does it, you can shrug it off the next hour or so. But when The Mother-Lord Bullet Slaps you, you'll have flashbacks of it every episode.

LIGHTNING STRIKING: Whenever the plot thickens, lightning strikes, followed by the roar of thunder. It happens around 10 times every 20 minutes. The Lightning Striking also occurs after The Bullet Slap and when The Mother-Lord and The Spineless Housewife stare at each other.

SECRETS AND MYSTERY: What's a soap opera without mystery? A soap, that's what. End of story!

Husband too. She aspires to, one day, become The Manipulative Aunt. Her favourite quotes are:
 "You missed a spot."
 "My food tastes better when it's not poisoned."

THE GUARD/SERVANT: He keeps poking into the family's business, but he cannot be spoken of in the Debating Circle since he's not part of the family. He is thought of as a lackey for The Mother-Lord, just like The Oddball is the lackey of The Manipulative Aunt. Comes fully equipped with terrible acting skills.

THE OVERSTRESSED HUSBAND: This is only character who is usually not shown every episode. The Charming Husband needs no job, just needs to look handsome but The Overstressed Husband needs a job or else he can't provide for the family. He has a daughter and a Spineless Housewife of his own. He can't tolerate buying food, which soon after gets poisoned. He also can't tolerate his Spineless Housewife's incompetence in taking care of the child.

THE MOTHER-LORD: She is the boss of all things. She wears a key-ring on her nose from which all the important keys of the house hang, like the key for the lock for The House Elder's diabetes medicine. You wouldn't want them to

THE RICH SPINSTERS: Never usually shown, but they come when a major event is taking place, like a holiday or when a kidnapping/poisoning occurs. They wear the fanciest clothes, surpassing The Charming Husband. They make snarkiest remarks, surpassing The Tattletale Step-Sister. They have no husbands and probably became rich from a divorced husband's alimony. They hang around with other spinsters and prey on the weak like vultures. I recall this one incident in which The Spineless Housewife and her daughter were playing with manure and The Rich Spinsters said things like, "It looks good on you," and "It'd be terrible if someone noticed that your shoes don't match with that manure you're playing with."

Integral plot elements

DEBATING CIRCLE: This happens when all of the people in the family meet in the living room and discuss everything that happened in their boring lives. When someone poisons food it is not tolerated in the household. Many trivial topics are talked about here. The House Elders oust all guilty people, a.k.a. housewives. Main issues that arise in the Debating Circle are:

- Who should we marry her (any

HOUSEWIVES: Women don't work, they're all housewives. Men are always surprisingly at home too. Does anyone have jobs? All they have to do is prove themselves to The Mother-Lord, or prevent others from proving themselves. It's like Hunger Games every day, except you get poisoned food as a reward.



LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION: Soap operas only take place in the house. Every time they leave the house, the child of The Overstressed Husband gets kidnapped. This is why we stay at home!

ORIGINAL AND INTERESTING STORY: What's this doing here? This isn't an aspect of a soap opera.

5 MINUTES OF INTENSE LOVE: "When it's with me you only need two minutes, because I'm so intense." The Charming Husband stares at The Spineless Housewife for an extremely long 2 minutes that feel like 5 minutes. And after these 2 minutes of intense love-making, The Charming Husband either makes a snarky remark and/or tells her to stop poisoning food. This intense love can only occur when they are engaged. It never happens once they are married, just like in real life.

