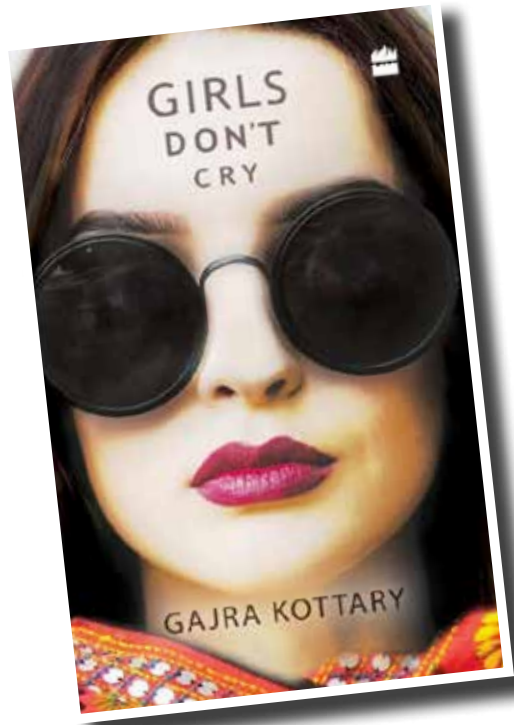


Sense



Making Sense of Television Writing

Gajra Kottary, the award-winning storywriter of popular serials, *Astitva*, *Jyoti*, *Veera*, *Buddha* and *Balika Vadhu*, cruises through the nuances of television writing...

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Television, these days, is mostly about *babus* morphing into flies, avenging *icchadari nagins*, scheming in-laws and the likes. The good shows, if any, are few and far between. Which era is Indian television in today? Palaeolithic? Neanderthal? Golden? Is there any silver lining in the cloud for the medium that once gave us gems like *Buniyaad*, *Alpviraam*, *Astitva* and *Malgudi Days*, or is it the era of *pallus* getting drawn longer, kitchen politics getting pettier, increasing the girth of the *sindoor* on the forehead and scripting stories about *saas*' from hell that can make Miranda Priestly seem saintly?



Gajra Kottary, one of the prolific writers from the industry, examines the situation...

1 **Yes, television content has gone regressive.** If I were to make a board statement. There are a few shows and a few tracks within some shows that are progressive, but they are hopelessly outnumbered in terms of sheer ratio by the

they are watching. Despite this black and white portrayal, both categories have their share of style icons.

This belief has been lent credence by the fact that a lot of such rubbish serials have been really popular and the ones that dared to be different did not bring in the required numbers. Because of this fear and insecurity stemming from the research data, no one wants to risk being different. So, although as an industry, we are capable of being sensible, we dumb down all the time.



4 **Novel writing is more liberating.** After my first daily, *Astitva*, I actually stopped writing screenplay. But, I do episodic stories for my shows.

Television writing keeps me in touch with

3 **It's a failure of both programming and writing.** As writers, we have to stand our ground and really try harder to think and write differently and not succumb to the convenience of grabbing work that entails us to encourage the trend of stereotyping.

As programmers, we will have to be risk takers and push the envelope. Also, we will have to be patient and encourage new thoughts, even the change-resistant ones.



avalanche of unrealistic and stereotypical portrayals. I get to hear from a lot of people, who earlier did watch a few shows, that they have altogether stopped watching Indian television. That's sad for me to hear.

2 **Women's portrayal in Indian television suffers from the chicken and egg syndrome.**

The general belief in the TV industry is that women (comprising major viewers) do not want to see real women characters. They want to see women who are *sati savitris* or vamps, without having to think too hard about what



the masses and ensures that I am learning something from my team about the ever-changing trends in the world.

My novel writing ensures that I quieten down after all this frenetic interaction and be with myself to discover if I have something to create or not. I must confess that novel writing is a wee bit more challenging, empowering and liberating due to the sheer freedom it gives me.

5 What is said between the lines is sometimes more critical than what the actual lines say. I have done the story development for *Balika Vadhu* and I can definitely vouch that we



never tampered with the innocence of the kids involved. They remained kids in a confused and double-faced world of adults right up to the end of the portrayal of their childhood. There was never the slightest hint of romance between the kids, and I am proud of that.



In fact, we advocated some sense dawning on the adults when they noticed the beginnings of dangerous adolescence in these kids, ensuring their separation. I



am a firm believer in the adage that context is everything.

6 TV writing has made me a creative labourer! Writing for television is quite exhausting in the era of dailies, but it disciplines you completely and that has helped me, both in my personal and family life, as well as in my other forms of writing. Unless I am physically unwell, I have learnt to write, not by mood but by the time at disposal. Writing for television gives me a heightened sense of responsibility and power.

7 Dr Simran Mathur broke stereotypes.

Dr Simran Mathur from *Astitva Ek Prem Kabani* was a thinking woman, a career person: strong and vulnerable at the same time. She was moral and straightforward, yet bold in her personal life. Her character actually broke

stereotypes and showed that TV viewers could love and relate to a working woman who was ambitious and yet not a vamp; bold and yet not immoral.

8 The women of my novels aren't faultless. They are real and think for themselves. The women of my novels

are not superwomen either, they are a combination of being strong and vulnerable, which is why following their journey is interesting and relatable!

My novel *Girls Don't Cry* parses the lives of three generations of women in a middle-class family and the choices they make as they navigate a man's world. 