

'I just tried to be different

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GAJRA Kottary, a gold medallist from the Indian Institute of Mass Communications, started her career as a journalist at **The Statesman** in Delhi. She switched to writing for television and short stories in the mid-1990s and has written the story/screenplay for award-winning and critically acclaimed serials like *Astitva ~ Ek Prem Kabani*, *Panaah*, *Kya Aap Kbusb Hain*, *Humare Tumhare*, *Jyoti*, *Ghar ~ Ek Sapna*, *Godh*, *Bharaai* and *Balika Vadhu*. Kottary has earlier published two short story collections, *Fragile Victories* (1996) and *The Last Laugh* (2003). She spoke to **KARAN BHARDWAJ** at the launch of her first novel *Broken Melodies*.

What is *Broken Melodies* about?

It is a deeply moving novel about the search for beauty in our lives juxtaposed with the Delhi of the 1970s and 1980s. It is the story of a young girl, Niyati, who is curious and full of hopes and dreams but lives in a dysfunctional household clouded by parental conflict. The novel has a sensitive depiction of her emotions, uncertainties, dilemmas, struggles, bouts of warmth in such chaos and how she takes control to bring the shards of her life together.

Is it entirely fiction or does it have some real components? Is it also influenced by any of your personal experiences?

I cannot explain what part of it is fiction or fact. It is a blend of things. But it has a component of my life as well. There are a few similarities that I share with the protagonist. Like Niyati, my father (Pandit Amarnath) was also a musician. I grew up in a family of musicians in an artists colony. Over the years, I have realised that there is a sameness in issues being faced by children and adults at different levels.

How did writing begin?

I was an introvert in my growing years. I have learnt to be an extrovert now. With all the years of script writing and convincing channels to get approvals, I have developed the act. Earlier, I would be scribbling all the time. I took a lot of time to get comfortable with the world of words. My friends used to tease me that I had a flair for writing only and I couldn't figure out behind the scene politics.

You began your career with journalism. How's the experience?

It was fantastic. I started my career with **The Statesman**. Though I was given a desk job, I used to love writing on issues related to women. The kind of fear we had of all the dots and commas to be put in place was something that stayed with me for life. Whenever I sit and write a speech or any non-fiction piece, I remember my **Statesman** days where I used to write short sentences. I still have four articles with me published in the newspaper.

How did fiction writing happen?

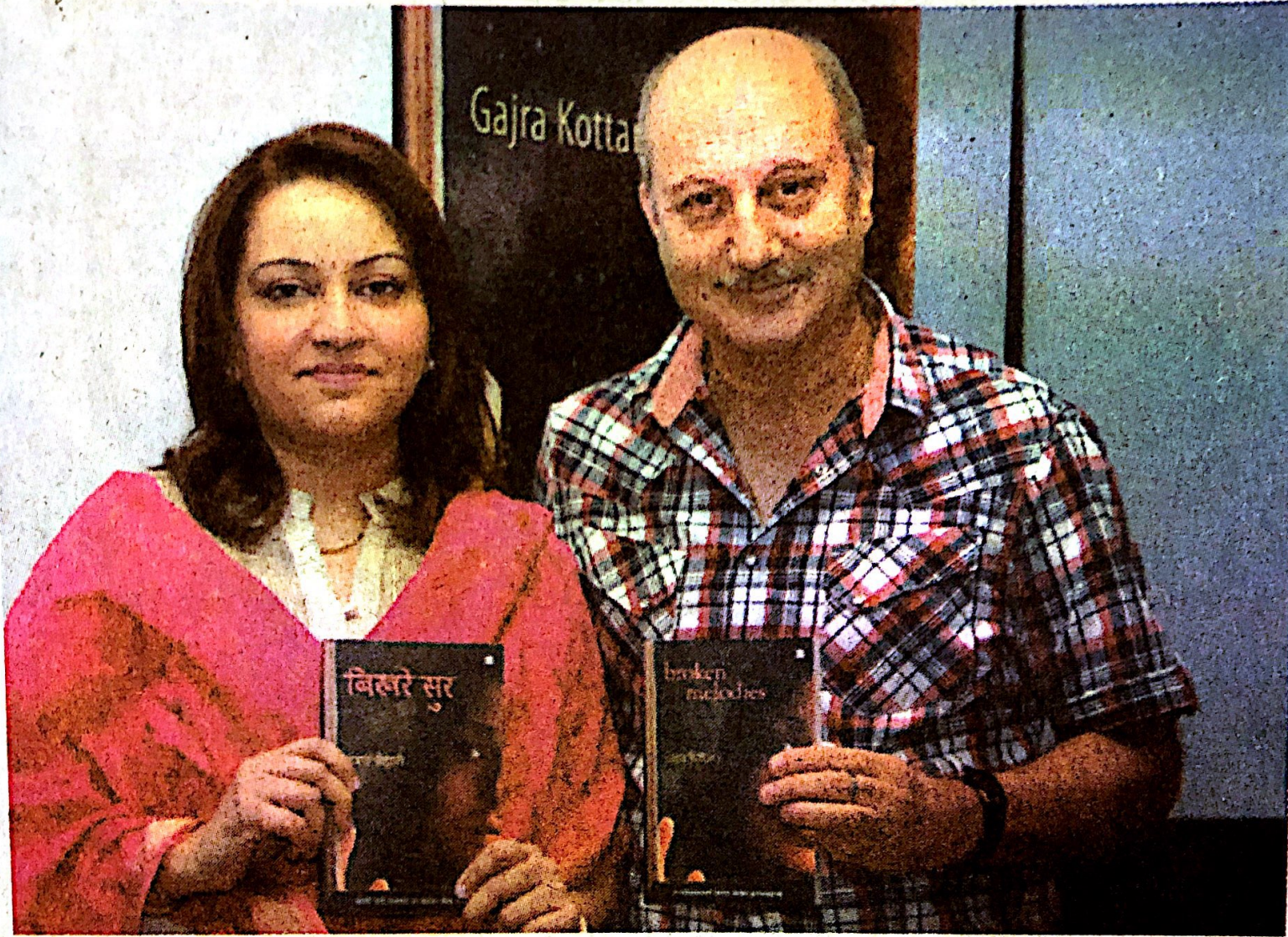
I left the job after I got married to look after my two children. Sitting at home, I was feeling frustrated. I discovered my true calling during that time. I began writing short stories and published my first collection. It proved to be a stepping stone. The book was read by Mahesh Bhatt, who gave me a chance to work as script associate for a film. I also worked with his wife on a serial called *Humaare Tumhaare*.

You finally tasted success with *Astitva - Ek Prem Kabani*.

Yes! In the first two years, we were pleasantly surprised with the success of the serial. We



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Gajra Kottary and actor Anupam Kher at the launch

were like *chalega to chalega varna band kar denge*. A lot of people tell me that they stopped watching TV after *Astitva* got off air because they never found anything like that again.

And it continued with *Balika Vadhu*. But it was even riskier and an experimental project.

Astitva was a clincher. The fact that it worked, despite being a different theme, inspired me to write different story lines. I just tried to be different. *Balika Vadhu* is like a forum for us and we

are exploring different issues through it like nata pratha, local brain drain, etc.

After the success of this serial, I got an offer a day with three times the money. Right now, I am doing another two shows with Colors.

Do script writers require more attention?

We are nameless and faceless people. We deserve a bit more recognition than what we get. We make a significant contribution to any serial. But I don't hold any grudge for it.