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PRESS CUTTING

Modernity a far cry for women on TV

Independent and bold women characters are no more taboo in films, but one wonders why television serials have failed to come of age as far as realistic portrayals of Indian women are concerned. The makers of these serials say TV gives as good as it gets - women are usually appreciated by audiences as subservient, overtly loyal and moralistic or evil, conniving and home-breaking characters.

That's the reason why the holier-than-thou Tulsi Virani of *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and and Parvati Agarwal of *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii* ruled the roost for more than a decade.

They seem to have passed on the baton to the evil *Ammaji* of *Na Aana Iss Des Laado* and heartless Dadisa of "Balika Vadhu" that are popular today. "Television cannot be about superwomen. It has to be about the average Indian women; otherwise it will lack identification," Ekta Kapoor, the creator of India's most wanted *bahus* Tulsi and Parvati.

"For me, 'power' for a normal average Indian woman living in a country like ours with so many social and family pressures is survival in itself. So if a woman survives, the different travails she has to go through, the legacy of belief that she has to accept and at times when she stands up and survives as an individual - for me that's woman power in itself. That's just how we show our characters standing up against oppressive mothers-in-law or characters in small town India standing up against the social mindset," she said.

Shows like *Hum Log* and *Buniyaad* were the pulse of the nation in the 1980s, but TV content took a quantum leap when Subhash Chandra launched Zee TV, the country's first privately-owned channel in 1992.

Women were shown smoking, drinking and wearing provocative clothes in shows like *Tara*, *Banegi Apni Baat* and *Hasratein*. These shows — that even touched upon subjects like extramarital affairs and live-in relationships — caught more eyeballs from the urban class than from the rural populace. Cut to the 21st century, and Indian television became larger than life with Kapoor's mega shows *Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi* and *Kahaani Ghar Ghar Kii*. Despite their rich milieu, the soaps spoke of middle class values and the ethics of a traditional Indian woman.

"We are trying to redefine the 'Indian bahu' on TV with this show. But when it's about a commitment to the family and how fiercely protective this bahu should be towards the family - that is something we wouldn't want to change. Those values must always resonate and be constant and yet getting refreshed by the experiences of today," said Gaurav Banerjee, head (Content Strategy), STAR Plus.

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