



no one will look twice at him, whereas when I go out "properly" dressed in a *shalwar kameez*, I will most probably be subjected to some kind of harassment, be it someone staring, passing comments, or touching me. It frustrates me that a woman who is more educated than her husband is not congratulated or celebrated, but kept hidden away -- like a dirty secret, someone to be ashamed of. It infuriates me that girls younger than me are often robbed of their innocence too early in their lives, and are blamed for it -- sometimes even ostracized or killed for it. When these grave injustices are done in the name of religion it further enhances my anger. Common sense can only take you so far -- especially when religion comes into play, because no one wants to get on the wrong side in this particular case.

I get angry about these things, but it is an egocentric anger, not a do-gooder one, because I know that as a woman, I am in as much danger as anyone else. I cannot run away or close my eyes to the fact that being a woman puts me in a separate category, and not one that is overall pleasant. Instead, no matter what class or what part of society a woman is in, there is almost a hundred per cent chance that she is regarded as beneath her male counterparts.

I am unable, however, to put myself in a

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situation outside of the closed box that I have created for myself -- the one that I shelter myself from the outside world with, because reality bites, and who needs reality when you can watch Shah Rukh Khan on DVD and forget all about the floods drowning half the city and threatening thousands with infectious diseases?

I suffer from what people refer to as selfishness and greed. I like eating at nice restaurants, I like driving in an AC car, I get frustrated when I cannot afford a designer outfit or purse, with matching shoes, and I never spend a minute's thought on the poor old woman in her tattered sari living two blocks down from my apartment in a tin hut. Her house is halfway under water at this point. Every morning she trudges through the disgusting slimy green water, with her sari hiked up around her knees.

I'm slow, though, because it takes me a while to realise that the same sense of injustice I feel as a woman, when a man looks at me funny or passes a jeering remark about me, is similar to what this woman feels every day, when I pass her on my way back home and she stares at me, wondering why God gave her this fate and not mine. ■