
KALKI KOEHLIN, Actor, India

We know what we are, but know not what we may be.

As a divorced Bollywood actress living in Mumbai, life's a balancing act. Between being famous and wanting a personal life, being seen as sexy while retaining my dignity. And India both applauds and castigates me.

Near the beginning of William Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, Hamlet, we're introduced to Ophelia. She's an innocent chaste girl and potential spouse for the Prince of Denmark. Yet Ophelia struggles with the conflict of being her brother Laertes' sweet sister and Hamlet's breeder of sinners.

This is the dilemma facing India's women. We are all modern Ophelias.

By some we're expected to be traditional and pure.

I shall obey my Lord.

While by others we're encouraged to be independent and sultry.

Lady, shall I lie in your lap?

No my lord.

Do you think I meant country matters?

There is conflict and confusion in our minds. And these pressures can become unbearable.

A social worker abused by men claims herself and takes her own life. Another is raped and killed on a Delhi bus. She's questioned for what she is wearing and shamed for being out late at night.

For Ophelia, it becomes quite impossible for her not to disappoint all the men in her life. It ends in her suicide.

God had given you one face, and you make yourselves another.

These women died because they were caught between desire and expectation.

I do enjoy the dazzling glare of Bollywood, but sometimes I don't know who I'm supposed to be.

In Hamlet, I can't ignore the agony of Ophelia; just as we can't ignore the tragedies unfolding around us every day.

In Indian society, there are limitations, but there is liberation too. I'm hopeful for an Ophelia who doesn't drown in the river, but swims strongly to the other side.

O, woe is me. To have seen what I have seen, see what I see!

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