two too much?

MEHER MARFATIA wonders whether men multitask as winningly as women

FIVE YEARS AGO A DISNEY FILM DID IT. EXPLAINED exactly how I, and possibly women the world over, see ourselves – as master multi-taskers. The character we identify with being *The Incredibles*' Elastigirl, the Parr family mother. Blessed with superhuman strength to rubber-bend, she packed the screen with power. "She's like Mummy!" lisped an excited toddler rows ahead.

I strained, in vain, for my own eight-year-old beside me to shriek similar recognition.

Which woman is worshipped on her home turf, I sighed. Others of our gender speak for us. Veteran journalist Bachi Karkaria declares, "Genetic hardware, honed on handling homes and families, makes us tackle pressure, shift speedily to Plan B and multitask. Nothing in the corporate fishbowl compares with husband, baby, doorbell, steam cooker and maid going off at the same moment." On the professional front, might men who multitask still lag a bit? Because, as some concede, more women have smaller egos and larger hearts: twin qualities workstations whirr smoothly on.

The jury being out on that one, I ask one of the most balanced young men I know to react. After animated discussion, my 25-year-old nephew Sanjay and his university mates feel men fail in this area because they're allowed to. "We're not impressed with the ladies' multitasking abilities at our age, when compared," he says. "But motherhood seems to be that event when everything changes. Women discover they can juggle career, social calendar and family life well. Men frequently let many things slide, knowing whatever they don't do will eventually be taken care of by the spouse."

So we back off and hope the opposite sex learns better time management? Forget chaos, many of our dearly beloveds duck attention needed to perform simple twin acts. Girls, would we stop short of waving a hand to hail a friend while driving with music on? As a colleague and I crossed the street, a car pulled up, her husband at the wheel. "Hi," I called cheerily. He returned the merest nod. The pal piped up: "Nah, too busy sucking in those cheeks to try Jim Morrison's gorgeous cleft and shake to the CD I've gifted. You expect him to do that, mouth *Light My Fire*, steer through traffic *and* greet you!"

Men moan they can't do everything at once. Not all but most women prove they can. We ditch the drama. Sift and juggle. Embrace several situations together. Our male buddies flounder and flail, work up a wail when asked to act laterally. They think 'or'. We run on 'and'. Octopus-like, women get a grip on stuff spinning in madly different directions.

There's more. Prepare for perverse, reverse frustration as guys pick the oddest multitask moments. Funny, it's The Doors again. A boyfriend once sat across me at an Irani café, whose jukebox blasted *Wishful Sinful*. I craved for a tightening of his handhold each time the gravelly 'Our love is beautiful' line cranked out. Instead, he was lost doodling designs on the paper napkin and plotting how to clamp a stalking ex-girlfriend's phone calls. "Thought you'd want that," he protested (not unreasonably).

Excuse me. I'm leaving for an edit meeting and to collect a salary cheque. Not forgetting the bigger reality check…. On the way there's Open Day at one child's school, the other's craft project materials to buy, Dad's 85th birthday cake to order, an aunt's obit to fax newspapers. And an article to finish writing: about men preferring that women plan their social calendar. Now, they too have fully functioning opposable thumbs to text messages, schedule events. Why depend overmuch on us?

But that's another story.