editor's letter

Above: Gitanjali, Meetesh, Neha and Jitendra from team *Marie Claire* (who 'louuouuve SRK') pose with their favourite alternative cover layouts; right: Shilpa Shetty, in the line of ire

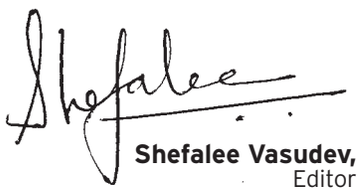
Dustin Hoffman once famously asked Laurence Olivier what acting was all about and Olivier replied, "Look at me, look at me, look at me." This has really been a look-at-me month, unless you want to call it the making of a spectacle. Abhishek-Aishwarya's engagement as breaking news, Shilpa Shetty's racist torture on a reality show as supposed heartbreaking news, and Shah Rukh Khan's television re-debut as broken news. Our obsession with celebrity is nothing new. As a little girl crazy about Rajesh Khanna, I remember wearing a white frock to 'mourn his loss to romance' the day he got married to Dimple Kapadia. It was the idea of my neighbour *didi* and I willingly agreed! People used to write letters in blood to the evergreen hero Dev Anand, and the entire nation went numb when Amitabh Bachchan was injured on the sets of *Coolie*. The killing of Beatle John Lennon was the extreme expression of the same compulsion.

And yet, there is a shift. The attention we now give celebrities in this globalised, glamourised India is creating new ideas of publicity, promotion and pomp. The life of stars is the stuff of our collective dreams. We can construct – in our unspoken thoughts – a fantastic world they inhabit, one that makes our own lives small in comparison. No wonder, the ruckus is hardly about *KBC's* new lease; it is about Shah Rukh as the man who can transport us out of the mundane, non-fictional world. Shilpa, as the accidental icon of an anti-racist debate, has less to do with our concern for racism. It is more about the mix we now want of illusion with bold streaks of reality. Fandom with a cause. Shilpa should thank her stars.

In 1966, John Lennon scandalised his fans when he claimed that the Beatles were more popular than Jesus. Obviously an overstatement, but the truth lies between the lines: a celebrity plays the role of god and feeds on human frailty to admire the powerful.

So now we have celebrity cooks, celebrity yogis, even celebrity criminals. Many celebrities don't even have a worthy introduction – they are just that – 'celebs'. Known for their 'well-knownness'. Fandom and stardom seem to be the two slices of bread between which we must find our worth. For those who are neither, life is a bland sandwich.

In an era that celebrates dizzying popularity as ultimate power, I don't think we could have found a better symbol than Shah Rukh Khan for *Marie Claire India's* first male cover. SRK may be the star we love, but he is also a big slice of the 'social text' we have chosen to write; the spectacle he rustles up is a chapter from our new cultural history. He is who we want to be.



Shefalee Vasudev,
Editor