

# editor's letter



Above: It was memorable to be a part of the jury for the Prix d'Excellence de la mode Marie Claire awards held in Paris last month on the last day of the Paris Fashion Week; right: Yulia Tymoshenko with her braid; below; film actor Sarika on the reportage trail for the child labour story



The under-clad Mahatma Gandhi made the world sit up and notice him without an image manager determining the folds of his *dhoti*. His political image could be seen in a thin but mind-bogglingly influential volume called *Hind Swaraj*. Plain karma is no longer a smart political strategy. The stunning Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, who was recently on a fashion magazine's cover, is an example. Charming and clever, with no interest in unnatural beauty treatments, she uses her looks as a statement in the male-dominated political world. Her campaign symbol, her long blonde braid wrapped around her head, ended up twisting the political fortunes of her opponents. It's a calculated political and cultural tool. Tymoshenko's plait carries two messages. Nationalism (it's a traditional Ukrainian hairstyle) and religious overtones. As a woman working on the revival of the church in her country, her braid, say observers, resembles divine halos from representations of Christianity's orthodox icons.

Hillary Clinton too is busy portraying an image. Propelled by advisers, she tries to be a woman who laughs instead of one who grimaces; as an easy, feminine and faultlessly dressed presidential candidate. Whether she will get more votes or not is yet to be seen. Gossip goes that murder convict UP MLA Amarmani Tripathi was advised to wear spotless white *kurtas* for a clean image, and his murder-accomplice wife to cover her *sindoor*-smeared head. Manipulating perception didn't help the murky couple who will now rot in jail for their lives, I hope. Whereas Mayawati, instead of hiring makeover mavericks, set to work uniting the Dalits with the Brahmins – a rare political feat. Her unsophisticated *salwar kameezes* didn't come in her way. The pressure to look good or like someone you are not is a flaky one. Remember that ad where a woman asks: do I look fat in this? The answer should be: if you are fat, you'll look fat. Eventually we all look like who we are and what we do.

Even then, what we do may not be enough. The story of Manju Yadav (p.90) left me feeling hollow for days. Not because I am vulnerable or compassionate. But because her urban and educated employers – Faridabad-based Manish and Ritu Gupta – allegedly dealt with this child like barbarians. 'Child Abusers Behind Bars', the tagline for our What Women Want Forum, is the least we should ask for such exploiters. Beating and berating little kids into slavery isn't a smaller crime than rape or foeticide. I urge you all to save at least one child each from a lesser life; stop hiring children as domestic helps and let their pain seep deeper inside you. Only then we may rise as warriors against a reality that should bother us beyond sympathy. It was a moving time for us when National-Award-winning actor Sarika, passionate and stoic about abolishment of child labour and our ambassador for the cause, joined our campaign – Each One, Save One.

*Shefalee*  
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