

Transgender and PROUD

Bullied, harassed and oppressed for acting feminine, even though she was born a man, Tashnuva Shishir eventually came out as a transgender person during her twenties, and took up dancing and theatre. Now, being a social worker, she has emerged as a forerunner to the trans-movement in the country.

Shishir plans on being a professional model in the future, just so she can prove to the rest of the world that if men and women can do it, so can someone from the transgender community. With her increasingly prominent platform to make the case for equal rights, she is vocal about being a woman.

Star Lifestyle recently spoke to Shishir for the Woman's Day issue, and learnt a little more about the phenomenal personality and thoughts that make her who she is she.

WHAT WERE YOU LIKE, AS A CHILD?

After four daughters, my parents had me — their son, and they were ecstatic. This actually became a major problem later on. During my juvenile years, my elder sisters encouraged me to get into dancing and I did; but my father, being a conservative Muslim, never approved of it.

I had to, for a while, leave dance classes just to make him happy. Soon however, I realised that I could not live without my passion — dancing — and it had become an inherent part of my personality, so I began tutoring students. With the income earned, I used to secretly attend dance classes, even securing a first place in a competition.

My mother and sisters knew about my affection for dance, but kept it a secret from my very conservative father. Around 2016, I reached the height of adolescence, and that is when I realised that many things were not syncing. I felt very strange with my body, my mind was telling me that I was a girl, but my physical appearance stated otherwise.

People began bickering and calling names, this really hurt my family's sentiments. As a result, I went into a depressive state and performed badly in my SSC exams, and because of this and a few other family issues, my parents decided to shift me to my uncle's home in Narayanganj to continue my studies.

There, I met a theatre group and got really interested in the art form. However, my interest in dance also remained, and I continued taking lessons with my earnings from the tuitions.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO LEAVE THE WORLD OF DANCING?

My father did not like it at all, and he banished me from the house when he ultimately found out that I had been secretly taking lessons. Additionally, I began losing

interest in myself because of my special orientation. It was certainly different from my physical self. I liked and preferred women's dance styles more than men's and the dilemma remained, as the dance gurus always suggested the latter form.

WHEN DID YOU OWN-UP TO YOUR ORIENTATION?

After father threw me out of the house, my financial situation became dire, but luckily, that's when I started working as a volunteer at Bandhu Social Welfare Society, and this welfare trust particularly worked with mental health and transgender rights. That's when I began counselling, and I realised that I was not the only person in the world facing these problems. My depression started to wane and that helped me concentrate better on dance and theatre.

WOULD YOU SAY YOUR STRUGGLES ALMOST ENDED?

Oh no! Not at all. My struggles were far from being over. Whenever we went out of the city to perform, men had their separate changing rooms, as did women, but the transgender community had none, and this is just one example of having to continuously struggle in this world to establish basic human rights.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

In my life, what I have learned till now is that gender identity should not be a factor. I have been an aficionado of theatre work and dance since a very early age, and both these fields are absolutely performance based. My point is if my orientation does not matter then why should it become a barrier?

YOUR MESSAGE?

Everyone should be knowledgeable about their forte and work accordingly — man, woman, or transgender. As long as people are hardworking and dedicated, there's no scope for bickering, backbiting and pulling others down. In order to prove oneself to the world and rise beyond any sort of apprehension, everyone must be diligent and work towards their goal. Then, definitely, in the near future, Bangladesh will be completely different from what we see today.

By Mehrin Mubdi Chowdhury

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