

#FASHION & BEAUTY

FANTASTIC BRAS, BODY POSITIVE AND MORE

In conversation with Monoshita Ayruani

For the longest time, girls and women in Bangladesh have refrained from talking about their bodies...that too, in public. When we needed pads for periods, we mouthed it out to our friends inaudibly. It is also no surprise we did the same when someone's bra strap surfaced from under their shirt in a room full of people. Long story short, breasts, bras, and lingerie have always been excluded from conversations.



The experience of shopping from Dhaka College is often awkward as salesmen ogle at women's chests and hand them bras, out of which, only one or two would actually fit. Monoshita Ayruani realised that she could travel and purchase lingerie from Thailand or Singapore, but there is a group of people who are unable to do so. For that reason, she and her brand, SHAPE, thought it was high time we addressed the elephant in the room.

Monoshita already had 8 years of experience under her belt, working at WebAble Digital, particularly in brand-building.

"My core strength at the time was working in humanitarian sector projects. I had previously interviewed women RMG workers in slums to learn how they were impacted by the Rana Plaza tragedy," she recalls.

According to Monoshita, the RMG sector is a large manufacturing hub in Bangladesh where most of the workers are women. From further due diligence, she discovered that lingerie production in Dhaka College, Pink City, or any high-end stores selling bras and lingerie products, are

mostly leftovers of export rejects. Being of export quality, they are mostly made for European or American body standards, as opposed to Bengali or South-Asian body types.

"Initially, I just wanted to introduce size consultations to help people find the right products. However, the existing product gap and taboos made me realise that size consultations alone cannot solve this problem. So, I decided to start a business that will specifically cater lingerie and bras," says the entrepreneur.

Thus, SHAPE was

founded in September, 2019. Over the last few years, the brand has been able to serve a large number of women and more recently, foster collaborations with various social media influencers.

For Monoshita, the shape started with experiences close to home.

"My mother passed away when

I was eight years old. I was already facing issues growing up but so did my friends, their mothers, and women in their extended families. I didn't want the next generation of girls facing such awkward challenges," she explains.

Through SHAPE, Monoshita advocates for comfort, health, wellness and breaking the stigma surrounding women's bodies.

"Most girls in Bangladesh experience chronic back pain from their early 20s as a result of not wearing the right fitted bras. Heavy-chested women can suffer from constant chronic headaches or constant chronic migraines if they are not properly supported by their bras.

"Among other health issues include poor posture, breast pain, skin

irritation, and breast tissue damage which may, in some cases, even lead to cancer in the long run. These health issues are based on data, doctor consultations, and proven facts," she elaborates.

Addressing the seamless range of bras, Monoshita emphasises on the need for functional lingerie.

"The seamless bras are a game-changer for a space like Bangladesh given our social context, environment, weather, skin tone, health and fit. I wanted to unburden women from the daily dilemma of matching their bras with their outfits. Hence, the seamless bra looks invisible under your clothes and we have tailored them in nude colours which work for our bodies," she says.

Unlike the wired bras which pose the risk of cutting and digging into our skin, the seamless range takes a different approach to ensure maximum support.

"Wired bras are not always bad, but perfectly fitting a wire to a bra is difficult even if you have purchased the right size. So, we opted for a padded solution, which provides support from under the bust so that it gives a minimising effect from above. The pads are also more flexible and they hug the body as well," highlights Monoshita.

As a local brand, SHAPE is a passionate advocate for body positivity which has been invaluable for women between ages 18-35.

"I genuinely enjoy our photoshoots because we do not edit the photos. So, we normalise models having stretch marks or a curve on their bodies. Nor do we edit the sizes of their bodies to make them look thin or full. I try to feature as much real body standards as possible. This portrays my value and view of the world and I hope more people can see it that way," she says confidently.

Whilst challenging social taboos, SHAPE gets its fair share of criticism in the digital space.

"Despite gaining popularity, we received a lot of backlashes from conservative audiences. We politely explained to them that our business would only thrive if it demonstrated how the products would fit customers. This line of communication was well-received by women, which was mainly our target audience," explains Monoshita.

Despite being a brand for women, SHAPE does not confine itself to a "women-only" community. Often, we have seen men attending some seminars where we are present.

