Glamour on the Catwalk

Posted on

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The lights go down in the auditorium. Backstage the stage manager cues in the follow spots. They sweep through the audience at random. The excitement builds. The music starts. A heavy pulsating beat. And suddenly they're there! Gliding down the catwalk. Strutting along the aisles. Swirling. Spinning. The flashes blaze away capturing the glamour, the glitter. Welcome to model-mania!

Modelling, in Sri Lanka, is an industry that's just about coming of age. "How come?" you may ask "Weren't there models before?" Of course there were! Think about Sigiriya, that incredible rock fortress built by King Kasyapa I. Think of the world famous frescoes that adorn Sigiriya…captured not by a camera and a flash-gun but by an unsung artist's talent. That's over 1500 years ago! I like to think of these gorgeous females as our land's very first models…but they probably weren't.

Modelling has, until recently, been a no-no in our society. Why? Because we Sri Lankans are basically a very conservative people. However and I think this is the real reason behind it -modelling hasn't, until now, been given the type of publicity it deserves. And now, there are people to create that publicity, although modelling hasn't yet been developed to its full potential. There has always been talent around, but today there are people and institutions to take that talent and train it. Finishing schools and people who have studied modelling abroad have classes for prospective models. They teach the secrets of the finer techniques of modelling: how to walk, general poise, make up, the lot! These training institutions most of which have begun operations over here recently have done a lot for the modelling industry as a whole. They created an awareness of what modelling is all about. This awareness has been boosted with the organization of shows such as Model of the Year, and that's the sort of publicity that the industry needs.

So what is modelling all about? -it all glamour and glitter and parties all through the week? Not so! Definitely not so! I obliged a friend and became an extra -one of the fill-in models -for a photography session. A whole group of us stood in a sun-drenched field, getting drenched to the skin as the photographer's assistant hosed us down with water that seemed frozen with one specific purpose in mind – to make us extras uncomfortable. There's more! White we were getting soaked, we were supposed to smile! To look happy! To look like we were enjoying ourselves! Believe me, it was tough!

It taught me a lesson, though. Modelling is not all glamour and glitter. There are two types of modelling. The warts-and-all type and the fashion type. Both types work equally hard. Both types are equally prestigious. Take the warts-and-all type of

model. This person, despite the uncomplimentary tag, is the sweetheart of advertising agencies the world over. They are the people we ordinary folk relate to when we see their faces. These models lives aren't as easy as you'd think them to be. They have to sit for hours while the photographer sets up his lights. They wait patiently while their hair and make-up are done. They don't dare touch their own faces to wipe off sweat. Instead they have to wait while someone carefully dabs them with a wad of cotton, not streaking the make-up. These models are sometimes required 'on location'. It's taken for granted that they look fresh, excited, cool or whatever emotion the photographer wants them to express, in the most trying conditions . . . like having sunlight reflected on their faces. Or being soaked with water, like me! (Not that I'm a model of any sort of standing.)

Modelling is tough.

And fashion modelling . . . Ah, the fashion models! Besides having all the qualities of the warts-and-all models, these people have what I think is an absolutely incredible talent. The talent to change clothes … FAST! It's totally beyond my understanding how these people are so calm and collected when they appear on the catwalk. How they gracefully glide, when only moments before they have been scrambling into a tight-fitting suit. How their hair and make-up appear immaculate, when only seconds earlier pins and clips and brushes and powder-puffs were swarming all over them. Fashion models are considered by some to be the cream of all models. This is probably because fashion models get the correct type of publicity. A person is hardly ever remembered for appearing in a particular advertisement, but a person is remembered for modelling a new selection of clothes from a reputed designer. Dress designers, incidentally, are the 'patrons' of fashion models. And how does one become a model? Well, basically it's still a friend of a friend business. You've got a friend who's got a friend who is looking for a model … you say you're interested and that's it.

You're a model! This is due to the fact that the new professional training institutions have yet to 'catch on'. Society has to change it's outlook on modelling as a whole. Only then will we see people choose modelling as a professional career. Until then – and if you're a female – beauty pageants are the easiest method of entry into the world of modelling. There are many beauty pageants around today … enough to harvest a crop of models that should keep the dress designers satisfied.

When it comes to finding models for advertisements – the warts-and-all type-advertising agencies rely on the services of model agents. These agents are a breed

apart: they are people with courage. Courage to face rejection … and yet keep trying. Courage to face irate parents and boyfriends -both parties that have a major say in a girl's decision to model. Courage to take a chance on promoting a new face.

But why model? What makes people do it? Why parade for others? Or pose for the benefit of a product? The answer is simple. Money. Most models supplement their regular income through modelling. There are very few full-time professional models in Sri Lanka . . . and then there are people like me, who help friends out. However, there are other reasons too. Being backstage during the presentation of a dress designer's newest creations, I was amazed. I got the impression that the models loved what they were doing. They loved the lights. They loved the quick changes. The last-minute adjustments. The whole business! That, I believe, is the secret of being a model. You've got to love doing it. Now it is the amateurism of modelling which is the very thing that makes it a 'fun' industry to be in. Handsome, rugged men and beautiful, lithesome women, please take note. This is the time to get into modelling … if you think you can handle it!

I asked a friend of mine – who is a model – how he got into it. "Machang," he said. "I was at this bar … and this person comes up to me and asks me if I would like to be a model. I looked over his shoulder, saw the company he was with and said yes! That was it! I've been modelling ever since, and I love it!" He went on to tell me about the hard work that went into modelling. Not the hard work on the catwalk, or in front of a camera, but the hard work that went into the organization of parties of day trips…I was tempted. I now regularly frequent this bar, hoping that someday someone, somewhere would need a warts and all model who looks like me.

So far, all I've got for my troubles are huge bar bills. Maybe there's a moral in this ..



