



BEHIND THE GLITZ AND GLAM of the Bangladeshi fashion industry

#FASHION & BEAUTY

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The allure of the fashion industry anywhere in the world is apparent, often giving out a fabricated feeling of certitude and hopefulness, when in reality there are thousands of obstacles living in 'whispers.' From 'casting couch theories' to favouritism and exploitation, the grievances could go on forever. Things take twice the tumble, especially in a developing country like Bangladesh where a formal home-grown fashion industry has yet to take shape.

An industry that promises high aspirations to the young and the beautiful, ultimately becomes a sour wound; disorganized and muddled behind the green screens.

The honorarium scams

Sonia Yeasmin Isha, a rising fashion director and choreographer of the country, has been associated with the local fashion industry for the last 12 years. According to Isha, she has given her complete efforts, and dedication to the industry for over a decade to become who she is today, one of the most recognised faces in the trade, someone who also chose to work behind the scenes and lead the industry as a choreographer.

"I was determined from the beginning, but you won't see as many people in the field with a similar story," reveals Isha.

According to the veteran model, the lack of proper grooming institutions, specialised modelling

Isha also points out the lack of unity in general.

"There's no association as such, no proper agency to hire us and delegate work and because of the shortfall, we often get cheated of our honorariums. Remunerations are often delayed, and work hours become intolerable."

"People only get to see the polished faces walking on the ramps, but they do not see the gruelling hours that we have to put behind each show. They do not notice our agonising journey, the

stress and the agitations. And sometimes even after all the hard work, we are conned of our dues."

"I am not saying that this is the norm, and there are many professional corporate brands in the market that perfectly follow the rules, but things definitely would have been better if there was a governing body looking over," she said.

Inquired about sexual discriminations, the senior model was slightly hesitant to speak about the subject matter.

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Niki Mizzan is a rising model of the city who has been the face of many upscale fashion brands agrees with her colleague. She points out the fact that many organisations do not provide legal papers or a form of contract before delegating work.

"Everything mostly happens over 'verbal trust', and that's very 'easy' to deceive. And if we choose to protest, it

would mean less work and that's hard for many of us, who actually depend on the profession to pay for our living expenses," said Mizzan.

Mizzan was open about her experience in the industry.

"I began work as an assistant director in a production house and then moved forward to become a face in the industry. So, I have seen it all."

Talking about her grievances, Mizzan

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According to the designer, Bangladesh is a flourishing market for the home-grown fashion industry, but lack of rules and regulations pollute the environment.

"Everyone who can go to a tailor and order a dress, is able to call themselves a designer nowadays. Even importers of garments are calling themselves designers and this is overcasting the real concept. There's nothing wrong in doing business, in fact it is very encouraging to see so many women involved with the trade. But a line must be drawn somewhere, these people need to call themselves entrepreneurs or businesswomen, not designers! The latter group are individuals who spend hours to create fresh designs, which are out-of-the box, authentic and unique," states Ahmed.

Speaking on the business prospects, Ahmed reveals that business is expected to flourish in the next few years because of the booming population, especially young adults and the fashion-conscious working men and women.

"Things would have been more exciting if our people were more open to experimental clothes. This would have encouraged us to truly work with our



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mentioned the absence of legal papers to certify experienced models as professionals.

"If I ever wanted to venture out in the foreign market, I wouldn't have any legal documents to show. Besides few pictures which I could have taken anywhere, I don't have any formal contract papers or even a professional certification as a ramp model. The grooming institutions and the model agencies actually provide all these and it's highly necessary for the field to develop to an international standard."

"In an age when people are going global and there are models of various capacities, from plus size to hand, face and even models with down-syndrome taking up prestigious titles and space in world-renowned shows and magazines, why should we fall behind because of a lack in congruency," revealed a frustrated Mizzan.

Imitator designers

Tasha Ahmed, a professional designer who graduated from the prestigious Raffles International College in Thailand with a degree in Fashion Designing, adds on to the grievances.

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Lack of conceptualisation

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 30



agencies or even the lack of assistance from seniors in the field, leads to the frustration.

"I have been extremely lucky to have been mentored by Azra Mahmood, a renowned choreographer and senior model of our country in the early stages of my career. She helped me reach my goals, but not everyone is as lucky."

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 30