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**The New York Times**

# Fashion & Style



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**AUTOS**

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E-MAILE



Fred Prouser/Reuters

**NOT** After his arraignment, with Sanjana Jon, his sister; and his lawyer.



Adam Rountree/Getty Images

**BEFORE THE SHOW** The designer at New York Fashion Week in 2003.

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James Devaney/Wireimage

The dark-eyed, 33-year-old fashion designer has been released on \$1.3 million bail after having been charged last month by the district attorney's office in Los Angeles County with 32 counts of rape, sexual battery, lewd acts on a child and other ugly crimes, against a dozen women — all models — aged 14 to 23.

"It's the pattern of a sexual predator," said Jane Robison, the spokeswoman for the district attorney. "It's a serious, serious case."

Ronald Richards, Mr. Jon's defense lawyer, said this is a case of thwarted expectations: the young women had sought to trade sex for a career in fashion. "You can't fault a man if women throw themselves at him," he said.

Mr. Jon, who faces life in prison if convicted on even some of the charges, has pleaded not guilty. In the first interview since his arrest, he said: "I am not a criminal. I am facing serious charges. But I am 100 percent innocent."

Still, the indictment has thrown into turmoil his glad-rags-and-riches ascent, lending a sinister twist to the tabloid-ready story of a pampered immigrant climber with media-age instincts.

Six weeks ago, he was busy planning the debut of a new jeans line and a reality television show for VH1 with his friend the actress Michelle Rodriguez. His Web site declares, to an Indian-disco backbeat: "Dressing up society princesses, rubbing shoulders with celebrities, mixing with the bold face names, Anand Jon himself has become fodder for the paparazzi."

Now, there is a police investigation into his sexual conduct in three states — California, New York and Texas — and one of his former publicists, Chris Hulbert, has told Page Six the designer once came on to Mr. Hulbert's 19-year-old date, saying, "You have a very comfortable neck, would

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**INSIDE**

New York Fashion Week in 2004.

you like to have sex with me?’ ”

The scandal has also taken on an international dimension. Mr. Jon, who fixes the visitor to his Web site with a sultry gaze from behind a curtain of ink-black hair, is well known in his native India, and national newspapers like The Hindustan Times and Calcutta Times follow every development with interest.

So who is Anand Jon? A rapist? Or a mark? To some he is a garden variety arriviste, an overeager cad, who crossed the line into criminal territory when his sense of entitlement overwhelmed his good sense. To others he is a struggling design talent, who played by the same elastic set of rules that govern everything else in the celebrity world and fashion industry — except he was caught.

“We all know that when success comes very young at a very high level, people somehow lose a part of their compass,” said Catherine Saxton, a longtime fashion publicist in New York, whose clients have included Dennis Basso, but not Mr. Anand. “He was flying in a very high crowd and flying in that crowd for quite some time.” On the other hand, “there are a lot of young girls who want to be in fashion, who want to be in shows, who want to be photographed — who want it,” she continued. “It’s very easy to be subverted.”

She added: “He had the sizzle. If you were a wannabe, he was a great coattail to ride on.”

IT was a single sexual encounter, around midnight on March 4, that led to the series of accusations against Mr. Jon. According to the police report and to lawyers involved in the case, the designer had been corresponding on the Internet for months with a petite blond 19-year-old woman in Seattle. She was a lingerie model. He was interested in getting to know her. She sent pictures. He said Los Angeles Fashion Week was coming, and did she want to visit? She did.

“Hi babe,” the young woman wrote in an e-mail message on March 2, according to Mr. Richards. “Here’s my e-mail to send my information and confirmation number to. Miss you and can’t wait to see you. Love and kisses.”

She arrived by taxi at his Beverly Hills apartment around 11 p.m., according to the police report. She went upstairs, entered Mr. Jon’s bedroom and changed into yoga pants and a T-shirt. She sat on the bed. He kissed her. She said she was menstruating and asked him to stop, putting up her arms.

“Is this the only reason you brought me here?” she asked, according to the report.



“Not the *only* thing,” he responded.

Then, the report says, he forced her to have oral sex. He proceeded to have intercourse with her, but she first asked that he “at least use a condom.” He declined.

Afterward she went to clean up. Mr. Jon sat and meditated.

The following day, after going out to eat with two of Mr. Jon’s assistants, the model went to a rape center in Santa Monica, Calif., which sent her to the police station in Beverly Hills, where the sexual encounter occurred. Mr. Jon was arrested the next day, and an indictment soon followed.

“Why would she change into pajamas?” asked Mr. Richards, Mr. Jon’s lawyer. “Why didn’t she leave when she sees there’s no bed for her? Why didn’t she punch him in the face?” He noted that there were no signs of physical trauma. “My client is 5-foot-4 and 130 pounds. He’s a thin Gandhi-type guy. He can’t overpower anybody. Any girl would kick his butt. It’s not even a close call. That’s what’s so silly about this.”

But what struck the police in Beverly Hills, explained Ms. Robison, the prosecutor’s spokeswoman, was the emergence of two more victims in the days following the arrest, who recounted the same pattern of behavior, including a 15-year-old whom Mr. Jon met on March 3, the night before the lingerie model arrived.

And as the police contacted other women in the designer’s life, more accusers came forward, with remarkably similar stories, going back to 2002. The district attorney filed an amended complaint on March 19, adding 4 more victims and 13 new charges: forcible rape, sexual penetration by a foreign object, sexual exploitation of a child, sexual battery, forcible oral copulation.

As this indictment began to hit the headlines, still more accusers emerged, for a total of 12 named in the court papers, one of them age 14 and another 17. None was older than 23, and each aspired to be a model.

“This was a revolving door,” Ms. Robison said. “The m.o. is similar. He allegedly met them over the Internet, promised to pay for a trip out here or sent them a plane ticket. And once they got out here, he used his position in the fashion industry to take advantage of them. And he allegedly told them if they said they were not comfortable: ‘Get used to it. This is what happens in the industry.’ ”

Mr. Richards sneers at the naïveté of all this. “I have girls who claim they were assaulted by my client and days later sent photos to be in his shows,” he said. “It’s strange. Is he being tried for capitalizing on women who are willingly sexual with him to get ahead, if he did that at all? All of these women have some twisted story.”

One story sounds twisted indeed, if not in the way Mr. Richards means. The father of a 19-year-old college student in Texas said that Mr. Jon contacted his daughter through her MySpace page in 2005, when she was in high school, and told her she had the fresh look he was seeking in a model.

Mr. Jon soon flew to Dallas, where the father picked him up at the airport, and with the girl’s mother, a child psychologist, grilled the designer about his intentions.

“We said, ‘We’re worried about this industry,’ ” said the father, who came to Los Angeles with his daughter last week to speak to the district attorney’s office. (At the father’s request, he was put in touch with a reporter by prosecutors. The father’s identity is being withheld to protect his daughter.)

Mr. Jon told the girl’s parents, the father said, “I treasure the feminine being. I got all this spirituality from my grandmother and my mom.”

But a few hours later, he forced the teenager to have oral sex at the hotel where he was staying, the father said. “I drove him to the hotel, where he raped my daughter,” he said ruefully.

Last November the young woman finally told her parents of this and other alleged assaults by Mr. Jon, and they first approached the authorities, the father said. Prosecutors in Los Angeles, who first heard the story last week, have not charged the designer in this case.

It wasn’t supposed to roll this way for Anand Jon Alexander, his full name used in court papers, who after years of false starts had finally seemed on the brink of establishing himself.

The child of a well-to-do family from South India, he arrived in this country as a teenager, coming of age in the hard-partying clubs of Miami in the 1990s. Mr. Jon cites a friendship with the designer [Gianni Versace](#) as one of his earliest breaks, and he studied at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale, before transferring to Parsons the [New School](#) for Design in New York City.

His first fashion line came out in 1999, when he got his intricately beaded gowns into Bergdorf Goodman, only to see that opportunity quickly fade.

But Mr. Jon was a child of his time, savvy in self-promotion and not consumed with the minutiae of fashion design. He was among the first to dress socialites like Casey Johnson, Lydia Hearst-Shaw and Paris and Nicky Hilton, winning the attention of tabloids and gossip columnists. He would carry his press clippings with him to show new friends at parties.

His simple Indian-influenced designs — typically, a floor-length silk skirt paired with a muscle T — didn't impress the critics or fashion insiders. "I don't think he was taken too seriously," said Sam Bolton, a night life photographer, who met him around town. "From my perspective he was just one of those people who was always doing events in nightclubs. The focus was on the after party, not the fashion show."

He traveled in entourages of women. Friends would visit his New York apartment near Times Square and find would-be models hanging around, half-clothed. "He'd spend several days with these girls," said a friend and investor in Mr. Jon's new jeans line, who declined to be identified because he did not want to be contacted by other news media. "I would see them. He'd walk around with two, three models at a time. He'd spend a week or two weeks with one group of models and then find another group of models."

In 10 years of his fashion industry work, Mr. Jon has not had a steady girlfriend, according to his friends. His muses were celebrities, like his friend Ms. Rodriguez, or Paris Hilton. And his closest relationship may well be with Sanjana Jon, his sister, who works with him and by all accounts does much to soften her brother's cruder edges.

When called to set up an interview with her brother, Ms. Jon was charming and polite, asking for an extra day because, she said, her brother was observing Passover and "in temple." (Mr. Jon has said that he embraces many religions, avoids alcohol and drugs and meditates every day.)

Still, Mr. Jon has flirted with trouble before. In 2003 he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor offense in which he kissed and groped a model during a photo shoot in Los Angeles. He had to take a sexual awareness class as part of his penalty.

Friends warned him: Take it easy. Keep cool. Don't be alone with a woman you don't know. If he listened, it didn't seem to change his basic promiscuity.

Part of the problem, friends explained, was financial. Mr. Jon could not afford high-fee supermodels and was always looking for young models to work free or in exchange for clothing. But they were inexperienced and perhaps naïve. And, no matter their inexperience, friends and others said, he seemed to expect sex.

Pennapa Chutima, a 19-year-old college student, said she modeled for Mr. Jon and had never witnessed any improper behavior. "He's never done anything like that, ever," she said, referring to the rape charges.

But there are also accounts on MySpace blogs by women whose encounters follow the pattern noted by the prosecutor. A woman with the online identity of Roxie McStumbles wrote that she met Mr. Jon, but did not sleep with him. "He kept telling me: This is your one shot to be famous, and if u walk out u'll be nothing!" she wrote.

In brief interviews over a few days last week, Mr. Jon suggested it was all a plot against him that would soon unravel. "This is not a simple situation," he said on Wednesday from New York, where he has gone to stay with his sister before his next legal hurdle, a preliminary hearing in Los Angeles on June 12. "This is part of a whole campaign against me."

He declined to explain further but promised that the truth would soon emerge and the charges against him would unravel on scrutiny.

It was all happening to him for a good reason, he said. "I am very blessed," he said.

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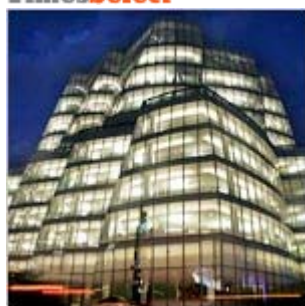
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