Modeling, the Aesthetics of Body in Culture: Issues and Impacts – An Ethnographic Study in the Silchar City, Assam

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Abstract. In all societies, peoples beautify or decorate or adorn as well as shape their bodies according to their norms and values. The decoration may be permanent – scars, tattoos, changes in the shape of body part, or they may be temporary – in the form of paint or objects such as features, jewelry, skins, and clothing that are not strictly utilitarian. Much of this decoration for beautification seems to be motivated by aesthetic considerations, which of course presently become institutionalized with a global appeal, may vary culture to culture.

However, in addition to satisfying aesthetic needs, body decoration or adornment may be used to delineate social position, rank, sex, profession, local, global and ethnic identity or religion within a society. Along with social stratification come visual means of declaring status and aesthetic from of body in the form of modeling. Modeling is an institutionalized form of beautification of body in contemporary culture and hence, one of the vital areas of present day social-culture anthropology.

Barak Valley is the second largest populated valley of Assam. From the year of 2014 modelling becomes more popular in Barak Valley of Silchar, after introducing a traditional beauty pageant and a Bengali life style magazine. An ethnographic and cross-cultural research was conducted among the models. Models are using their physical body for advertising by maintaining their body by exercise, dieting, regular care of skin, hair etc. to form cultural body. They are developing required body language day by day by proper grooming. Most of them are working for photographers, designers and fashion magazines etc. The methods like participation observation, intensive interview, case studies along with the structured questionnaires have been used to collect the empirical data for the present study. Some books, journals, internet sources have also been utilized for secondary data.

Keywords: Culture, body, adornment, modelling, fashion, professionalism

Introduction

The human body is the basic instrument of every human being, without which no human activities can be imagined (Fustel de Coulanges, 1877; Stavel, 1971). In the 20th century, researchers began to develop efforts to the body as an integral part of society and culture. “The body” emerges in the late 1970s as a central site from which scholars across the humanities and social sciences questioned the ontological and epistemological basics of almost all forms of inquiry. In anthropology, “the body” became such a central concept that by the mid – 1980s, its study burgeoned into a fully formed subfield, “the anthropology of the body”.

Three major turns in social sciences took place in the 20th century, namely a turn towards culture; language and body (Burke, 2004). The turn to attention towards studying embodiment occurred in Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology and other social science disciplines. In cultural and social anthropology, a systematic interest in studying embodiment had begun slowly developing after the second half of the 20th century. Human body and embodiment is possible to analyze at the three structural levels: modification, disciplination and semiotization process of human body (Soukup & Dvořáková, 2016).

French sociologist as well as ethnologist Marcel Mauss (1872–1950) became a pioneer of studying and enculturation, people personalize their bodies in a specific way Douglas in her works *Purity and Danger* (1966, quoted 2001) and *Natural Symbols* (1970) elaborated her own concept of body exploration. In the second aforementioned work, she differentiated the physical body from the social body.

The body dimply mediates information from the social system, of which it is an inseparable part, and it represents the social structure is projected, where the body itself is its image (Douglas, 1970, 1999, 2001).

Material culture of a society includes the dress, ornaments, decorating body with different kind's permanent-scars, tattoos, changes in the shape of body part. The decoration may be some times temporary – in the form of paint or objects such as features, jewelry, skins, and clothing that are not strictly utilitarian. Much of this decoration for beautification seems to be motivated by aesthetic considerations, which of course presently become institutionalized with a global appeal, may vary culture to culture. However, in addition to satisfying aesthetic needs, body decoration or adornment may be used to depict social position, rank, sex, profession, local, global and ethnic identity or religion within a society. Along with social stratification visual means of declaring status and aesthetic form of body appears in the form of modelling. Modelling is an institutionalized form of beautification of body in contemporary culture and hence, one of the vital areas of present day social-cultural anthropology (Miller, 2008; Nanda, 2004).

Aim and Objectives of the Present Study

The present research bears the following aim and objectives for the study as undertaken:

- To observe and interpret the holistic domain of modelling in culture of the area under study.
- To find out the role of dress code in the field of modelling in the area.
- To throw light on the measures taken by the models to represent their biological body to cultural body as per requirements and allied issues.

Methodology

a. Research setting: the area of observation

Present research was conducted in different areas of Silchar city because most of the beauty pageants are taking place in Silchar and most of the works related to modeling are based on Silchar City as their mainstream issues. So availability of the models is more in Silchar. Most models come in Silchar from other parts of Barak Valley, Assam.

b. Sample design

Snowball sampling technique has been used by the present researchers. Initial investigation has been started through known models and from each respondent the researchers obtained the contacts of other models. Thus total samples of 211 respondents were identified using the above specified technique for the study.

c. Methods/technique used to collect data

Quantitative and qualitative data have been collected to get appropriate information from the sample population by Participation Observation, Intensive Interview, Case Studies along with the structured questionnaires have been used to collect the empirical data for the present study.

d. Types of data used

The researchers used primary and secondary data to gather information concerning the research objectives. Some books, journals, internet sources have also been utilized for secondary data.

e. Tools for representation

Numerical data are interpreted by M.S. excel. Bar graph and line graphs are used for representation of data.BMI of models are calculated by the formula BMI = weight in Kg / height in cm^2 and the classification done according to the BMI chart given in the official website of WHO.

f. Limitations

The research work has done for less time. Due to lack of information married male models are not included in the study. And as the kids are not taking extra care for madelling and not earning from this field so they are not subject of discussion in this work.

Findings and Discussion

Modelling in Silchar is increased by the introducing of a Bengali lifestyle magazine ***swapnericchedana*** and a traditional beauty pageant '***Sharad Nandini'*** (most beautiful unmarried girl of *Durga Puja* Festival event) in Silchar in the year of 2013. Before it, modelling was not so familiar in Silchar as well as in *Barak Valley* but some beauty pageants like Miss. Hailakandi (Most Beautiful girl of Hailakandi), Mr. And Miss. North East (most beautiful boy and girl of North East region of India) etc had taken place in Barak Valley in different time period. But these pageants were **not regular** and the dress code of the pageants was **western.** These pageants were not accepted in the culture of Silchar and Barak valley. After the introducing of the magazine young models started to work as print models in the magazine in different issues. Criteria of the pageant was *age* (above 18 years), *parents' permission* and *minimal registration fee* (100/-). Advertising of the event were done by print media like news paper, leaflets etc and on screen media like local news channels, social media, etc.

After the huge success of the event, parents are also getting interested in modelling and ramp shows. In the same year another beauty pageant named 'Mr. And Miss Barak' took place with western dress code but the event was not successful. Next year another traditional beauty pageant also took place named '***Sharad Sundori'*** and this event was also succeeded. Gradually ramp walk was accepted as other cultural performances like dance, singing, recitation etc. But in the beginning years (2013 to 2014, 2015) traditional beauty pageants were succeeded not with the western dress code.

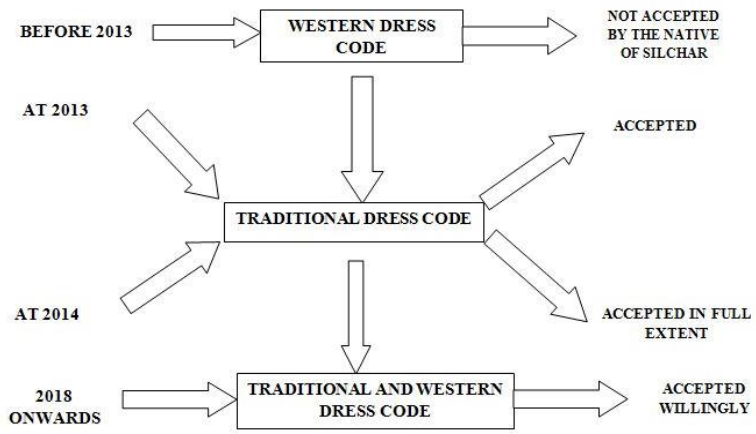

Figure 1. Diagram showing changing of dress code of beauty pageant in Silchar

Year after year numbers of beauty pageant increased in Silchar and numbers of participants also increased.

Table 1. Number of beauty pageant per year in Silchar

Sl No.	Year	Name of the pageant	Number
1	2013	*Mr. And Miss Barak* (Most beautiful boy and girl of *Barak Valley*), *Sarad Nandini*	2
2	2014	*Sharad Sundori, Sarad Nandini*	2
3	2015	*Sharad Sundori, Sarad Nandini*	2
4	2016	*Mrs. Ethnic Tradition, Sharad Sundori, Nababarsher Sera mukh* (Most beautiful face of Bengali New Year event, both male and female), *Sarad Nandini*	4
5	2017	*Mr. And Miss perfect, Mrs. Ethnic Tradition, Basanto Sundori* (Most beautiful girl of Autumn) , *Summer Queen and Summer King, Sharad Sundori, Nababarsher Sera mukh, Sarad Nandini*	7
6	2018	*Mr. And Miss perfect, Boishakhi* (Most Beautiful girl of Bengali first month), *Summer Queen and Summer King, SharadSundori, Nababarsher Sera mukh, Sarad Nandini, Mr. And Miss Ethnic*	7
7	2019	*Boishakhi, Mr. And Miss Barak, Sharad Sundori, Nababarsher Sera mukh, Sarad Nandini, Mr. and Miss perfect, Mr. And Miss calendar, Mr. And Miss Ethnic, Mr. And Miss North East Icon*	9

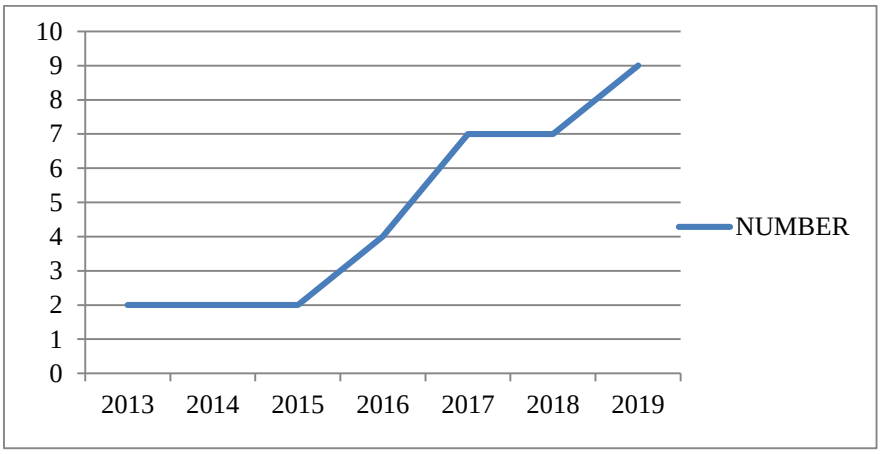

Figure 2. Diagrammatic representation of no. of beauty pageant per year in Silchar

Number of models increases with the popularity of the different beauty pageants. Different textile shops, beauty parlours, photographers and other business industries start sponsoring the different beauty pageants for their popularity. Some of the industries start to advertising by ramp with their products by the models in different events. Some starts to invite the models for photo shoots for commercial ads, fashion adds in print media as well as in social media. And thus run way modelling, print modelling, commercial modelling and fashion modelling become more popular in the land of Silchar.

40.75% models of Silchar are bellow 18 years old. They are doing the print modelling and run way modelling as well but not demanding or getting any financial award for their performances. As well as they are not taking any extra care of themselves for the field and they are accepted in all dress codes by the culture of Silchar so in the further discussion they will not be discussed. 20.37% models are unmarried females. 27.01% models are unmarried males, 13.27% models are married females but no findings of any married males.

Table 2. Age distribution of models

Age groups (in year)	No. of kids	% of kids	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	No. of married males	% of married males	Total	Total %
1-6	55	26.06	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	55	26.06
7-12	25	11.84	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	25	11.84
13-18	6	2.84	1	0.47	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	3.31
19-24	0	0	37	17.53	12	5.68	12	5.68	0	0	61	28.90
25-30	0	0	5	2.36	42	21. 32	7	3.31	0	0	54	25.59
31-36	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	3.79	0	0	8	3.79
37-42	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.47	0	0	1	0.47
Total	86	40.75	43	20.37	57	27.01	28	13.27	0	0	211	100

To get better opportunities models maintain their physical 'body' according to demand. Though there are no mentioned body criteria for being a model in Silchar but it is also true that we have not found any model with 'abnormal' physical features. No models from Obesity class are found. 71.87% models have normal weight.

Table 3. BMI of models

BMI	Classification	No of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No of married females	% of married females	Total no	Total %
<18.5	Under weight	11	8.59	2	1.56	3	2.34	16	12.5
18.6-24.9	Normal weight	31	24.21	40	31.25	21	16.40	92	71.87
25.0-29.9	Over weight	1	0.78	15	11.71	4	3.12	20	15.62
30.0-34.9	Class I Obesity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
35.0-39.9	Class II obesity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
>40.0	Class III Obesity	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

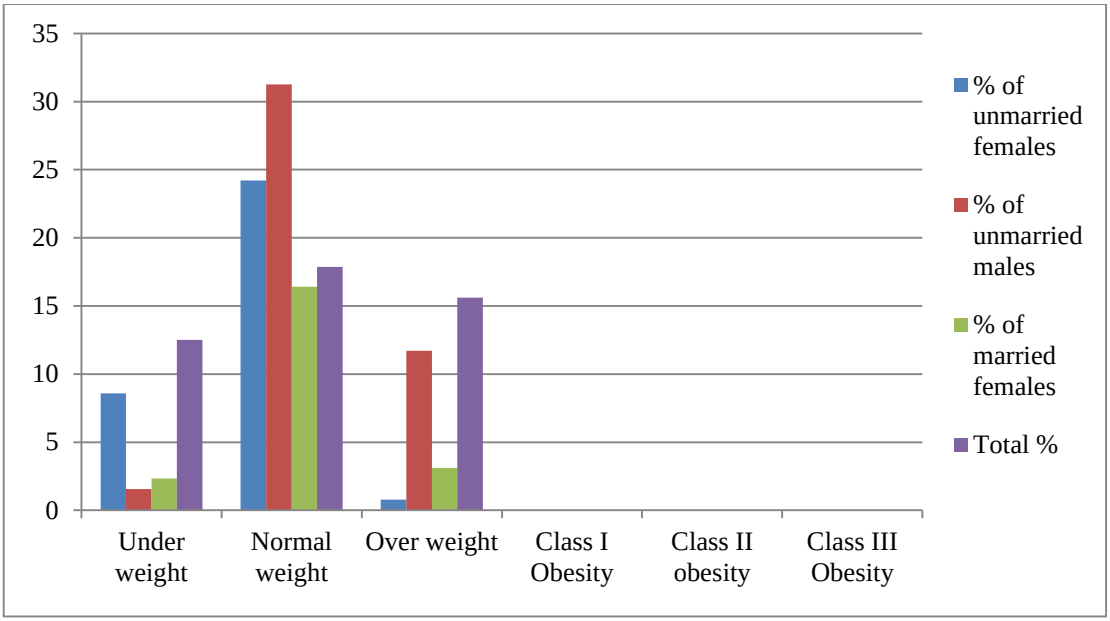

Figure 3. Diagramatic representation of BMI of Models

They are maintaining their appearance and some are trying to 'better' their appearance by some measures. And these are as follows.

1. Joining Different Fitness Classes

To be fit and fine and to maintain their desire weight, height or to achieve the desires fitness some models are going to different fitness classes like Gym, Yoga, Zumba etc. Only 8.59% models are not going to any fitness classes.

Table 4. Fitness classes of the models

Fitness classes	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Gym	7	5.46	51	39.84	9	7.03	67	52.34
Zumba	23	17.96	0	0	12	9.37	35	27.34
Yoga	9	7.03	6	4.68	0	0	15	11.71
Nothing	4	3.12	0	0	7	5.46	11	8.59
Total	43	33.53	57	44.53	28	21.81	128	100

2. Following Diet Charts

Though most of the models are going for fitness classes but all are not following the diet charts. 50.78% models are following the diet chart. Unmarried females are following the diet chat mostly and most of the males are not following the diet charts.

Table 5. Following of regular diet chart

Following diet chart	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Yes	31	24.21	28	21.87	6	4.68	65	50.78
No	12	9.37	29	22.65	22	17.18	63	49.21
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

3. Drinking Plenty of Water

Unmarried females and married females take 2.5L to 4L of water per day, and boys take approximately 3L to 5L of water per day.

4. Going Beauty Parlour or Beauty Salon

All models go to beauty parlour for different treatments in different intervals.

- *For hair cut*

Most of the boys cut their in interval of one month. 17.96% males cut their hair in 2 months and 4.68% boys cut their hair in 3 months. Unmarried females and married females cut their hairs in different intervals.

Table 6. Interval between hair cut of models

Hair cut	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	2	1.56	28	21.87	0	0	30	23.43
Once in 2 month	1	0.78	23	17.96	0	0	24	18.75
Once in 3 months	17	13.28	6	4.68	7	5.46	30	23.43
Once in 4 months	15	11.71	0	0	5	3.90	15	11.71
Once in 5 months	2	1.56	0	0	8	6.25	10	7.81
Once in 6 months	0	0	0	0	4	3.12	4	3.12
Once in a year	6	4.68	0	0	4	3.12	10	7.81
Never	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Hair colour*

Most of the girls colour their hair in 4 months. 10.93% females never colour their hair. Most of the boys colour their hair in 2 months. 3.14% males never colour their hair. 10.15% married females have never coloured their hair.

Table 7. Interval between hair colour of models

Hair colour	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	0	0	3	2.34	0	0	3	2.34
Once in 2 month	0	0	13	10.15	0	0	13	10.15
Once in 3 months	9	7.03	6	4.68	0	0	15	11.71
Once in 4 months	15	11.71	5	3.90	0	0	15	11.71
Once in 5 months	5	3.90	16	12.5	2	1.56	7	5.46

Once in 6 months	4	3.12	6	4.68	9	7.03	9	7.03
Once in a year	6	4.68	4	3.12	4	3.12	10	7.81
Never	14	10.93	4	3.12	13	10.15	31	24.21
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Hair treatment*

9.37% unmarried females go to parlour in 4 months for hair treatments other than hair cut and hair colour. 10.93% never went for such treatments. 17.96% male i.e., most of the males never went for such hair treatments. 9.37% of males go parlour in one year. 17.18% married females never went for such treatments. 3.12% married females go to parlour for hair treatment in 6 months.

Table 8. Interval between hair treatments of models

Hair treatment	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 2 month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 3 months	9	7.03	6	4.68	0	0	15	11.71
Once in 4 months	12	9.37	2	1.56	0	0	14	10.93
Once in 5 months	2	1.56	5	3.90	0	0	7	5.46
Once in 6 months	0	0	9	7.03	4	3.12	13	10.15
Once in a year	6	4.68	12	9.37	2	1.56	20	15.62
Never	14	10.93	23	17.96	22	17.18	59	46.09
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Skin care treatment*

There are no models that do not go to parlour for skin care treatment. Most of the unmarried females i.e, 13.28% go to parlour for skin care treatment in 3 months. Most of the males i.e, 14.06% males go to parlour in a month. Most of the married females i.e, 8.59% go once in 2 months for skin care treatment.

Table 9. Interval between skin care treatments

Skin care treatment	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	0	0	18	14.06	0	0	18	14.06
Once in 2 month	2	1.56	13	10.15	11	8.59	26	20.31
Once in 3 months	17	13.28	9	7.03	2	1.56	28	21.87

Once in 4 months	10	7.81	3	2.34	5	3.90	18	14.06
Once in 5 months	2	1.56	5	3.90	2	1.56	9	7.03
Once in 6 months	0	0	7	5.46	4	3.12	11	8.59
Once in a year	12	9.37	2	1.56	4	3.12	18	14.06
Never	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Manicure*

Most of the unmarried never went for manicure and 17.96% is their percentage. 8.59% unmarried females go to parlous for manicure. Most of the malesnevenr went for manicure. Married women go in different time interval for manicure.

Table 10. Interval between manicures

Manicure	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 2 month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 3 months	1	0.78	0	0	5	3.90	6	4.68
Once in 4 months	11	8.59	3	2.34	5	3.90	19	14.84
Once in 5 months	2	1.56	2	1.56	8	6.25	12	9.37
Once in 6 months	0	0	0	0	4	3.12	4	3.12
Once in a year	6	4.68	10	7.81	4	3.12	20	15.62
Never	23	17.96	42	32.81	2	1.56	67	52.34
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Pedicure*

Most of the unmarried females never went for pedicure. 7.03% go in 3 months. 21.87% unmarried males never went for pedicure. And 6.25% married females never went for pedicure.

Table 11. Interval between pedicures

Pedicure	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 2 month	1	0.78	0	0	0	0	1	0.78
Once in 3 months	9	7.03	6	4.68	3	2.34	18	14.06

Once in 4 months	8	6.25	7	5.46	2	1.56	17	6.25
Once in 5 months	2	1.56	9	7.03	7	5.46	18	7.03
Once in 6 months	0	0	3	2.34	4	3.12	7	5.46
Once in a year	6	4.68	4	3.12	4	3.12	14	10.93
Never	17	13.28	28	21.87	8	6.25	53	41.40
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

- *Threading*

29.68% unmarried females do their threading in one month. 3.90% unmarried females do it after 2 months. There are no unmarried females who are not doing threading. Most of the males thread their eyebrows after 3 months. 10.93% of males have never done threading. 18.75% married females do their threading. 3.12% married females do their threading after 2 months.

Table 12. Interval between threading of models

Threading	No. of unmarried females	% of unmarried females	No. of unmarried males	% of unmarried males	No. of married females	% of married females	Total	Total %
Once in a month	38	29.68	0	0	24	18.75	62	48.43
Once in 2 month	5	3.90	0	0	4	3.12	9	0.09
Once in 3 months	0	0	43	33.59	0	0	43	33.59
Once in 4 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 5 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in 6 months	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Once in a year	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Never	0		14	10.93	0	0	14	10.93
Total	43	33.59	57	44.53	28	21.87	128	100

5. Using Cosmetics for Care of Skin and Hair

Almost all models use more or less cosmetics to maintain their skin and hair properly per day.

Concluding Remarks

Pattern of beauty pageant is evolved from simple to complex form. Most of the pageants are organized around the traditional festivals.

At 2013

- Traditional dress code
- Entry fee 100/-
- Direct entry to the finale

At 2019

- Traditional and western dress code.
- Registration fee 200/- to 500/-
- Fee after qualifying the audition 1200/- to 1500/-

- Audition, semi-finale, grand-finale.
- Shoot in swimming costume
- Talent round

Physical body was the same in case of beauty pageants before 2013 and after 2013 also. But modelling was accepted in traditional dress code for the 1st time. Now western dress codes are taking its place in the culture of Silchar and beauty pageants but along with traditional dress code obviously.

Most of the models are having normal BMI. Models are regularly taking care of their full body shape according to their need. Height is not matter for modelling in Silchar. Thought weight is also not criteria in any beauty pageant or it is also not mentioned by any organization that the model should have any fixed weight but there is no data of plus size models.

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