Introduction

What is consumerism? How is this new culture of consumption that has gripped the world affecting India? As a city, how is Kolkata, the cultural hub of India, getting affected by the rise of this new culture of consumerism? Are there any changes occurring in the mindset of the people living in Kolkata, towards the concept of shopping as a leisure and pleasure-giving activity? What is the role of politics in Kolkata and does it have any role to play in influencing the recent changes? In what way is the Leftist government, through its New Communism, helping in creating an image of new Kolkata? What are the views and opinions of the people of Kolkata to these new retail developments that have manifested with the rise of the shopping malls? Is there any resistance to these new changes that are taking place? Through the mode of exploration and field engagement, this thesis aims at seeking answers to all these questions and some more that have been recurring in my mind and bothering me as a researcher. To begin with, it is necessary to understand the growing importance of consumerism as a theoretical stream, which has been coming up as an important area of study in recent times.

1. The need for the present study against a changing global perspective

It is natural that the first question that comes up is what is sociological about the study of consumerism. The answer lies in the theoretical orientation of modern sociological thoughts. This preoccupation of production over consumption, which is evident in the works of the Classical thinkers like Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim, gave way to a change in the orientation that saw a greater engagement in the study of consumption. So a range of thinkers like Theoristine Veblen, Pierre Bourdieu, and Jean Baudrillard contributed to the study of consumption and its social manifestations. While talking about consumption, it can be said that it is always and everywhere a cultural process, but ‘consumer culture’ (a culture of consumption) is unique and specific. It is a culture, which has transcended, the barriers and has developed into a global phenomenon. The study of consumer culture is not simply the study of
individual choice and wants, but rather, the study of such things in the context of social relations, structures, and institutions. The study of needs and wants explores the social relation between private life and public institutions. This makes no problem in situating the same from a sociological viewpoint. So it is this culture of consumption or consumerism that has attracted the attention and developed as the main focus of this work.

Since consumerism runs as the central theme in this study, the aim is to understand its impact on the social relationships, which has undergone changes due to its all-pervasive nature. Society is gripped by a notion of restlessness which is evident in all spheres of life be it economic, social or cultural. In the economic sphere, this restlessness is reflected in the insatiability of wants of goods and services. Similarly in the social and cultural spheres it is reflected in the vulnerability and fickleness of the relationships. In this context therefore, the study has tried to understand the changes that are occurring and are leading to changing social structures. Further, the work locates the effects of consumerism on the nature of shopping as an activity, which seems to transgress from a ‘necessary’ activity to a ‘pleasure’ and a ‘leisure’ giving activity. In this context it also tries to understand the changing character of the shoppers by looking into their impulsive shopping behaviour.

Consumerism has multifaceted manifestations, which are prevalent though various entertainment structures like the theme parks, arcades, shopping malls etcetera. As it is not possible to indulge in the study of all these manifestations, hence the study will take up shopping mall as the area of research. While studying shopping mall, a commonly faced question that comes up is: *what is sociological aspect behind the study of these malls?* In answer to such a question it can be pointed out that there exist several factors behind the choice of mall as a research area. These postmodern structures of consumption provide a fascinating area of study, as it develops within its confines, new dimensions of social relationships. Moreover it also provides with an interesting study of the concept of ‘public-private space’, which also calls for a sociological understanding. To elaborate further, shopping mall is a comparatively new phenomenon, in India, gaining immense popularity as a centre for shopping in not only the major metropolis, but
also in smaller towns and cities\(^1\), which definitely makes its study interesting. This rising popularity is also evident in the growth of the malls in various cites, which reflects the effect of consumerism that has gripped people in the frenzy of shopping. Having pointed out the reasons behind the need for the study of shopping malls as a site of consumption, the next aspect, which needs a detailed exposition, involves the choice of the area of study. The shopping malls that have been chosen for the study are located in Kolkata, a city having its own socio-historical background dating back to the British era. The reason behind the choice of Kolkata as the area of research and the selection of the specific malls is discussed in the subsequent portion.

1.1 Choosing Kolkata as the city for this study

Sometimes it is easier for an observer, who is not a part of the order, to notice the subtle changes that have occurred rather than those who are a part of the same. This is true for me, when after a span of five/six years I visited Kolkata. The first thing that struck to me during the visit was the emergence of this new culture of consumption that has resulted in a change in the archaeological structure of the city. Kolkata, a city which is considered to be dominated by middle class intellectuals, is fast undergoing a change towards the consumerist culture. The evidence of this is reflected in those numerous shopping malls that have developed in several nooks and corners of the city and many more, which are in the process of completion. The bedazzling experience which I had, while looking through the changing facade of Kolkata, helped me ponder on this phenomenon of the frenzy of shopping that seemed to have gripped today’s world. There have been innumerable studies on consumerism as a practice and shopping malls as the major site of consumption in the western societies. However, a search of the same in the Indian context made me aware of the scarcity of research done in this issue. This may be because, unlike America or the other developed western societies, the development of the shopping malls in India has been a very recent phenomenon. In that respect too, the cities

\(^1\) "Mall mania: The catchword is consumerism as the number of sassy and swanky malls is rising fast in India’s metros and small cities" by Sidipt Arora and Asish Kumar Sen, The Statesman, Lifestyle & entertainment, dated Saturday, 16\(^{th}\) July, 2005; "Mall mania to sweep small towns" by Ajanta Chakraborty, Hindustan Times, 28\(^{th}\) January, 2008; "Small-town goes mall town" by Sangeeta Singh, 7\(^{th}\) January, 2006 weblink: http://ia.rediff.com/money/2006/jan/07spec.htm?q=bp&file=.htm.
like Mumbai and Delhi were the first places where such malls started coming up. So, one
might wonder as to why the area of my research focuses on Kolkata, since Delhi or
Mumbai would have been a much better place for their study. The answer to that probably
lies in the city's basic socio-politico-economic environment, which has intrigued me in
choosing Kolkata over the rest. Kolkata, which had once been the seat of the socio-
economic development during the British rule, had witnessed a gradual decline since the
post independence era. Famine, coupled with continuous refugee influx and industrial
decline saw a steady deterioration of the city along with the rest of Bengal. In such a
scenario compared to the other metros, Kolkata was far behind in waking up into this
consumerist culture. One may also accord such a delay to the basic character of the city,
which has been traditional in nature coupled with its long Leftist tradition. If one looks
back into the rich cultural tradition, which Kolkata is so famous for, one will be sure to
point out that this is a city where the consumerist dimension was never an important aspect.
Thus it interested me to see how a city, which was so strongly oriented towards the Leftist
culture, is slowly being engulfed by the subtle forces of liberalization and globalization; the
repercussions of which is evident in the large sprawling malls creeping up at various parts
of the city. Also in view of the changing political and economic dimension resulting due to
the New Communism, how is Kolkata facing the onslaught of global capitalist and
consumerist culture? The views of the people are reflected through various interviews that
have been conducted on the changing façade of the city. The study tried to capture the
unbiased opinions of the people on issues like the rise of the malls as new forms of
shopping places vis-à-vis the traditional marketplaces, which are under incessant threat
from the big retail developments, to issues like the their preferred choice of shopping place.
In the process I tried to bring out the perceptions of the consumers as well as the shop
owners towards this new changes taking place in the city. Thus as a researcher, Kolkata
struck me as an interesting area of study of the rise of the consumerism vis-à-vis the
traditional character of the city.
1.2 Methodology of the study

For any research work, methodology\(^2\) acts as the connecting thread that links up the entire work. It can also been seen as the philosophy on which the work is based. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the changes that were taking place due to the rise of consumerism in India with particular reference to Kolkata, an interaction with the consumers was called for. The aim of the study is to understand the impact of the mall in the socio-cultural environment of the city of Kolkata. What is a mall without the consumers? The consumers, who were the key players in this research work, provided their views and perspective in various ways. To capture the opinions of a considerable number of consumers, semi-structured and unstructured Interview schedules were used as tools for this research. The study was also based on a semiotic reading and participant observation\(^3\) within the malls. This theoretical perspective, which is also described as the phenomenological approach, stems predominantly from Max Weber, where the researcher is concerned with the understanding of human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference. So the role of the researcher in this case, is taken up in the form of an observer, who develops an empathetic understanding of the objects of study, which here are the consumers and the shop owners. As a result, the employment of this methodological approach required a detailed observation of the objects under study, which was done by spending long hours within the shopping malls, in general, and in shops chosen for the study in particular. So the tools employed in the study included methods like participant observation and open-ended interview schedules which helped

\(^2\) It is sometimes used to refer to the methods and general approach to empirical research of a particular discipline. The principle concern of methodology includes a wider arena whereby it reflects the "philosophy of science issues in social science. This is the study of how, in practice, sociologists go about conducting their research in deciphering truth from falsity. So in short it refers to the process, principles, and procedures by which one approaches problems and seeks answers.

\(^3\) Though the phase lacks a clear definition, it is used to refer to research characterized by a period of intense social interaction between researcher and the subjects in the milieu of the latter. During this period data are unobtrusively and systematically collected. This method is usually carried on in instances where the researcher has no direct personal stakes; secondly researcher needs to spend a long time in the association of the object under study and lastly must be very keen in observing and taking down field notes after leaving the field. So it calls for a strong memory in recalling the exact interaction that takes place in the field. Another aspect, which is important, in this case is the ensuring of the emotional detachment of the researcher from the subject and his/her perspectives. So the researcher is in search for neither truth nor morality but understanding. So the task of the researcher is to cut through the commonsensical understanding of the "truth" and "reality" and to strive for a broader understanding.
in, the collection of descriptive data. This qualitative methodology helped in, not only locating the individuals in the holistic settings but also to view them vis-à-vis the entire environment, thereby seeing them as a part of the whole. So the individuals under study are not reduced to the mere statistical aggregates, which help in studying them from a subjective viewpoint. However, as the study required the understanding of the trend and general opinion of the consumers, hence the use of interview schedules also became an important aspect in the study. To cover a wide range of consumers, which was not possible through in-depth interviews (as the consumers neither had the time nor the inclination to interact for a long time), the use of interview schedules as a tool was utilized. So the work entailed a mixture of both a qualitative and a quantitative approach.

1.2.1 Methodological constraints

In order to understand the pulse of the people on their opinion on the shopping mall, the study also took into account the viewpoints of those who visited the major marketplaces, which were the main centres of shopping. Two marketplaces were chosen, which provided with enriching information on this issue. The interaction with the consumers at the marketplaces like Gariahaat Market and New Market did not pose any major problems. However, conducting the interviews at the malls was a different issue. At this point, I would like to bring into account the issue of private-public aspects of the mall. Each mall, being owned by private individuals or by an associate, had its own rules and regulations for maintenance of the smooth process of shopping. So, before conducting any study within the confines of these malls, due permission was taken from the authorities. They in turn imposed certain rules, which were on a verbal basis. The following aspects were to be followed while interacting with the customers.

a) No interviews or conversations were to be conducted with the consumers without their consent.

b) The consumers should not be interviewed while they were in the process of buying the products, as it would distract them for the activity.

c) My identity as a researcher should be revealed so as to maintain transparency in the entire act.
d) It should be made clear that the authorities had no link or interest in this survey, which was done from a purely academic point of view.

Though these were general guidelines given to me before permitting my study, the authorities at the City Centre and Forum Mall did not take further notice of my activities while I was conducting the research. At both these malls, the authorities had made no issue of my conducting interviews with the shop owners. However, the same did not hold true for the The Gariahaat Mall. There, the authorities had imposed instructions on my interacting with the shop owners. Certain questions, which were a part of my interview schedule pertaining to the rental charges and the annual incomes of the shop owners, were not allowed to be asked. Interestingly, the shop owners did not have any restraint on these issues but they were also urged not to disclose the facts. This was done by sending a member of the security personnel to accompany me to all the shops where I conducted the study. Thus the study at the The Gariahaat Mall in some sense, was restricted in nature and hence, caused a methodological drawback in my study. On the issue of taking photographic views within the malls, the permission was granted for the Forum mall and the City Centre mall while authorities at the The Gariahaat Mall did not allow this. So the snapshot of the exterior of the building was taken. With these constraints, the research role at the The Gariahaat Mall remained a bit passive one, pertaining to answers to only limited questions and so, more observational in nature. This observational focus was primarily on the activities of the consumers and the sales persons involved in the respective acts of buying and selling of products. Keeping in mind these methodological constraints encountered while conducting my research, I will now focus on the results of the study.

1.2.2 Choice of the Shopping malls

The next stage in the research was the selection of specific malls for my survey. Though Kolkata witnessed a rise in several shopping malls, the paucity of time prevented me from covering all of them. Hence, a selection of three malls was done. The first mall chosen for the study was the Forum Mall because it was the first mall that was set up in Kolkata and, by far, one of the most successful one. Situated at the heart of the
southern part of the city, it caters to that section of the population who are aware and conscious of branded items. It stores some of the major national and international designer outlets catering to a wide array of products, ranging from clothing to accessories. Being the storehouse of such a large number of famous brands, this mall is, ideally, the shoppers’ heaven.

The next mall, which was taken up as a part of the study, was the The Gariahaat Mall. Situated at the heart of the southern part of the city, *The Gariahaat Mall* is located at a very convenient position. A striking feature of this mall is that it is located in close proximity to the Gariahat Market which makes its study all the more interesting. The mall is located at a very convenient location, which can be reached by both road and the local train network that connects the city to the suburban areas. Further, the bypass, which is a major connector to the city, is very close to the mall. Apart for the accessible geographical location, the other reasons for choosing this mall as a part of this study were based on the following facts:

- The convenient location of the mall at the heart of the city.
- The proximity of the mall to one of the major markets of Kolkata – the Gariahat Market - may have been a major threat to the commercial aspect of the mall.
- Such kind of shopping mall is few, where there is no movie theatre located inside it.
- The construction of other malls like the South City Mall, Highland Park in near proximity to this mall, poses as a threat to the mall’s footfall.

While undertaking a study of the The Gariahaat Mall, answers to the reasons behind its choice as a subject of research were unfolded. Taking the first aspect, which is location of the mall, one can notice that the mall is very centrally located at the heart of South Kolkata. The strata of people, who belong to the upper-middle class and middle-middle class, inhabit the areas surrounding the mall. Thus, the mall tries to cater to the demands of these classes, thereby securing a sectional clientele of its own. Moreover, with the development of the Information Technology sectors in the vicinity (in and around Kasba area) where companies have developed their own residential
complexes, their proximity has resulted in very positive outcomes for this mall. In other words, the mall’s target patrons belong to three sections:

a) the middle class Bengalis who are centred in and around the Gariahat area
b) the niche class of the Ballygunj area and
c) the IT personnel who are located around the Kasba and the Garia area.

A major aspect, which made the study of this mall interesting, is its proximity to the Gariahat Market, which is considered to be a shoppers’ ideal place for shopping. For a prolonged period, Gariahaat had developed its by-lanes into one of the busiest hub of Kolkata’s shopping grounds. Hence it is deemed to be an ideal spot to shop, where one finds a huge range of shops catering to the demands of people from all socio-economic strata. The Gariahaat Mall has been functional for a little more than one year. However, it is not the only kind which is found in South Kolkata. Within a span of two- three years of its inception, there were a number of other malls due for completion. Of these, the major ones are the Highland Park and the South City Mall, both of which are now functional. Moreover, with the rate at which the retail business is gaining its roots in Kolkata, in a few years down the line, there would be a flourish of few more malls. Hence, in view of these malls which are due to open shortly, the major concern for the owners of the The Gariahaat Mall would be to sustain the competition. However, the mall authorities see this growth of the malls as a positive aspect because they feel that the growth indicates the people’s demand for such specialized shopping aspects. Moreover, they feel that instead of competition, the malls carve out a clientele of their own and thus maintain their own existence within a market.


Map Legend:
I – FORUM MALL
II – THE GARIAHAAT MALL
The last mall for this study is the *City Centre*, which is situated in the Salt Lake area of Kolkata. Salt Lake, initially developed as an extension of Kolkata, has slowly transformed into the nucleus of Kolkata. It has turned into the Information Technology hub of the city with concentration of all the major corporate offices as well as some of the government offices in it. A section of the Salt Lake area is residential, in the heart of which the City Centre is located. In recent times, the area has witnessed planned developments, which have facilitated the set up of various recreational centres like fun parks and shopping malls. Salt Lake, in itself is located around 10-12 kms from the main city and, till date (since the opening of the shopping malls and arcades like City Centre Mall and Charnok City), lacked good shopping complexes. Hence, the construction of City Centre as a shopping mall has immensely facilitated the people of the surrounding places.

**Map 2: Location of City Centre Mall in Salt Lake, Kolkata**

*Source: downloaded from http://www.calcuttaweb.com/maps/*

**Map Legend:**

III – CITY CENTRE MALL
The selection of this mall as a research study has been made, not only because of its location but also due to the unique philosophy that has been the background for the making of this mall. When one looks at the architecture of this mall one will realize that the vast multiplex plaza has been designed around a Kund - a water body - as the centre. The area surrounding the Kund provides an ideal place to sit and chat with friends, colleagues or families. This also provides a platform for interaction, where people from various groups, ages and background mingle with each other. It is thus a very rare example of a zone, where the notion of space as a private-public concept, can be studied. Thus, this mall has not just brought in the typical mall architecture as prevalent in the western societies, but has tried to incorporate both the modern contemporary look with the traditional Bengali environment. There is therefore, a unique blend of the nostalgic Kolkatan elements like the Bengali’s passion for ‘adda’[^4] and the concept of consumerism within the complex of this mall. The mall architecture thus tries to capture the spirit of Kolkata within the confinement of its postmodern architecture. That is the reason why this mall had to be a part of the study; for a sociologist cannot just negate the interplay of such strong socio-cultural elements within a modern contemporary economic structure. However, it is not just leisure that has led to the development of such a huge multiplex; the aim of the authority is to translate casual interest into purchase on impulse. The designer of City Centre, Mr Charles Correa, has tried beautifully to mix the two elements and has, to a great extent, been successful in doing so. The architectural construction of the mall also supports this philosophy. The construction of the hybrid mall architecture is also a unique feature, which has led to its incorporation into this study.

[^4]: Adda is the colloquial Bengali term used to refer to long sessions of idle chat where in Bengalis are engaged in discussions of issues over a cup of steaming hot tea. It is a very common form of group interactions where the issues of discussions may range on a variety of global-local issues. This form of chat is a very common phenomenon which is not only centric on the youth but also cut across any age-sex barriers.
1.2.3 Time period of fieldwork

The study of the field was conducted in two parts of which the first part included the pilot study, and the second part formed the actual field observation. The purpose of the pilot study was to look at the feasibility of conducting the field study within the malls and the market places. This pilot study (first phase 2005) was conducted for a span of a fortnight, which helped in gaining access to the field area as well as helped in raising some fundamental questions regarding the ways of approaching the respondents in the field. The second part of the fieldwork was again divided into two phases, of which the first phase was conducted for a longer stretch and involved the main part of the study. The duration of this phase, which was conducted in Kolkata, roughly stretched to a year and a half (Second phase 2006 October to 2007 November). The last phase was for a shorter span of time, conducted for a month and a half (2008), which catered to those areas that needed further exploration. The revisit of the field led to a better understanding and also helped in rechecking those issues which were somehow less emphasized or missed out in the earlier trips. The time of the field visits were kept in such a way so as to cover both the festive periods and the non-festive periods.

1.2.4. Process of data collection

This section will focus on the details of the ways in which the data was collected in the field. So here I will discuss the nature of the interview, the reasons behind the selection of the respondents, the objectivity and the reflexivity of the study and finally about the methods of observations and maintenance of the data.

1.2.4.1 Nature of interview: Qualitative and quantitative dimensions

As already mentioned earlier, the work required the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, which helped in extracting maximum information from the field area. The interviews which were conducted had a phenomenological focus, which was aimed from the perspectives of the participants (Haykto and Baker 2004). The primary aim of this type of qualitative investigation is to understand experiences as
nearly as possible as the participants feel or perceive them. Hence the in-depth interview method helped in gaining insights into the consumers’ perceptions and their subjective experiences of shopping. Interview method was the predominant mode of enquiry, in which the nature of interview was both of semi-structured and unstructured interview schedules. Even though the interview schedule helped in focusing my queries, there were times when the interviews did not follow any predetermined format. In many such cases the participants set up the course of the dialogue, which then took a discursive form. The questions in the semi-structured interview schedule included both open and closed-ended questions, both of which helped in the extraction of maximum information without much digression from the general issue. So just as in an open question, the respondent was allowed to express his/her ‘free’ opinion, similarly the closed-ended questions helped in reaching out and extracting some definite information. These questionnaires were administered by interviewing the subject in person. So both these types of interview schedules were used in the study, which were implemented differently depending on the subject under study. The quantitative tool of semi-structured interview schedule was used while studying the opinions of the consumers, visiting the malls and the marketplaces. Due to their paucity of time and their general abhorrence to the researcher’s interruption in their acts of shopping, this particular method of study was implemented.

Another aspect that needs to be mentioned is that, prior to each interview the participants were told about the purpose of studying malls in Kolkata and were asked to express their views on this issue. This also ended a lot of suspicion from the shoppers’ end, who otherwise mistook me for a sales person and were apprehensive and not interested in spending their time in answering questions. As a result of this openness in disclosing my identity as a researcher, I was able to get a favourable reaction from these shoppers. Moreover at no point of time were they asked to disclose their names, addresses and other personal information, which they were not comfortable about. Though the questions pertaining to the economic criteria were a must for the study, they were asked only when the shoppers were comfortable and ready to disclose some information. Each interview was conducted on a one-to-one basis with the participant. However in cases when there were couples or groups, the interview took place more in
the discursive form. The average time of the interview with the shoppers was approximately twenty to half an hour depending on the time given by the respondents. For the ten select respondents with whom I had the opportunity to spend greater time, the interview process carried on for a longer span resulting in spending half a day with them through their entire act of shopping.

Just as this is true that the main role is played by the consumers inside the mall, similarly it should be noted that the shop owners, who have their outlets, are also an important part of this research. These shop owners are equal players in this study along with consumers. So, a study of the mall culture was not possible without a study of the views and opinions of these owners. However unlike the consumers, the method of study for the shop owners needed some changes. As a result, unstructured interviews were conducted at two places: firstly, at the malls and secondly, at the major markets of Gariahaat and Esplanade. These interviews were conducted on the shop owners who have their outlets either at the malls or at the markets. Firstly, unlike the consumers who, being busy, were not available for a detailed interview, the shop owners did not object to a detailed interview session. So the times spent in these shops were much longer as I had the opportunity to sit and observe and conduct an interview over a longer period of time. Secondly, apart from interview, as a researcher, I was allowed to spend considerable time in each shop thereby assuming the role of an observer of what was going on within the shop environment. This helped in understanding the consumer’s buying behaviour while they shopped. Fifteen such shop outlets were targeted at the three malls, where I spent observing the shopping behaviour of the consumers.

1.2.4.2 Selection of respondents

As a result of implementing this method, a total of 115 consumers were interviewed within the malls out of the target of 150 respondents. This sample size of 150 respondents was taken with the idea of having equal representation from all the three malls. However, with the rejection of some of the interview schedules due to the non-responsiveness, the total came over to 115 of which 38 were from Forum Mall, 36 from The Gariahaat Mall and the rest, which came to 41, was from City Centre Mall. In the market
places of Gariahat Market and New Market, the sample size included 112 out of a target of 150 of which there were 57 respondents from Gariahat Market and the remaining 65 respondents from New Market area. In both cases, the rest of the interview schedules were rejected on the basis of data disparity or their incomplete nature. However, there were some within this sample size, with whom the interaction was not restricted to the interview schedule mode and involved greater interactions. There were ten such consumers with whom there were opportunities to interact through their entire act of shopping. This helped in observing their shopping behaviour from a closer range.

Having talked about the nature of the tools used, the next question which comes up in the process of data collection is the mode of selection of the subjects which in this case comprise the consumers. The consumers who were approached for the study stemmed from two sets, one who were already in the shopping malls and the other who were at the marketplaces. In both cases, the target sample was chosen, where all those visiting these areas under study had the equal chance of being selected. Also those who were approached for a detailed interview were based on stratified random sampling. In this case the area of survey involved the shopping malls and the marketplaces where there was certain difficulty in applying the random sampling method in its purest sense. As a result even though all the respondents had equal chances of being selected for the interview, only those respondents were interviewed who allowed to be questioned. In order to have a proportionate representation for all areas to facilitate and enhance the study, respondents were selected on the basis of specific criteria like age, gender and occupational background. This however affected the randomness of the sampling method thereby diluting the concept.

Among the shop owners the case was slightly different as the choice of the shop owners depended on several factors like the nature of the shop or the products it showcased; the location of the shop in the mall and often in the nature of popularity of the shop. So the shops studied included those, which specialized in the sale of foreign branded watches to clothes to even grocery items.

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5 In this method of sampling, each member in a particular stratum has an equal chance of being selected as the sample stratum has the same profile of features as the parent population.
1.2.4.3 Method of enquiry: objectivity and reflexivity

It has often been said that being a social researcher, it is very difficult to be totally objective since researchers study their fellow mates with a certain level of human subjectivity. As a result, it becomes difficult to attain a ‘value-free’ social research. So keeping this in mind, the approach advocated for this research is based on certain objective criteria, which helped in the choice of the selections of malls and the marketplaces, an issue which has already been discussed in the preceding paragraphs. The research however also required personal interaction with the consumers and the shop owners; hence in this context, the maintenance of objective stance became difficult. Moreover, while interacting with the respondents, there is the construction of a knowledge system, which is based on subtle power dynamics, existing between the respondents and the researcher. In this context, the concept of reflexivity is useful for the researcher in order to self-monitor one’s practices by which the professional knowledge and power is used in a positive nature in understanding the ways and practices of the respondents’ activities. So reflexivity in a researcher helps in understanding the varieties of meanings that are created or constructed while interacting with the respondents. This helps in the researcher’s interpretation of an interview with the respondents from various levels of analysis. As a social researcher in general and a sociologist in particular, I have tried to incorporate the reflexivity approach while interacting with the respondents in the field. This has helped me in gaining insights into their views and has helped in raising some fundamental questions whose answers were of immense importance to the study. A details of the approach used in the survey is discussed in the following paragraph.

1.2.4.4 Observation, participation and field notes

As the need was to observe the shopping behaviour of the respondents, it called for an interaction with the consumers and to understand their views on the changing trends of shopping in Kolkata. So during the initial days of the field trips to these shopping malls, a considerable time was given in loitering within their structures in order to understand and estimate the nature and mood of the crowd. This helped in
understanding the changing crowd composition that took place within the malls through the various times of the day. Also visits to these malls were structured keeping in mind the weekdays and weekends factors as here again there were major changes in the crowd composition. It is interesting to note that while walking through the corridors of the malls it was sometimes difficult in differentiating oneself as a researcher from that of a consumer, as the effects of the glass-paneled shops created a charm of their own which was definitely mesmerising.

Apart from walking through the nook and corners of the malls, observation within the malls also took place in various other ways. One of which was spending time within the shops outlets with due permissions from the mall authorities and the shop owners. This helped me as a researcher to look into the shopping behaviour of the respondents from a closer range, which included aspects like their awareness of the product’s quality, price, choice and ranges. So this role of an observer within the shops helped in looking at and understanding their behaviour unobtrusively, which resulted in a deeper understanding of their modes of behaviour. Further, the role of a participant observer with the ten consumers helped in an in-depth understanding of their views and shopping behaviour. Interestingly, as a researcher, my role did not however restrict itself to that of the observer. Rather while conducting this survey, at various points of time, I had also engaged myself in the shopping activities, which also included watching movies and eating at the food joints. The experiences of my own activities helped me in getting further insights to my study. So my role as a researcher was definitely that of participant observation. However in the process I tried my best in retaining a certain degree of objective attitude, so as to refrain from developing a total subjective attitude with any form of biasness infiltrating my observations. This objective attitude helped me in using my sociological enquiry to understand even an apparently mundane activity like shopping.

The detailed observations that were made while interacting with the consumers were recorded in the form of field notes, which helped in the analysis. In case of the shop owners the use of the field notes were very important, as they were interviewed on the basis of unstructured interview schedule. So their views were recorded in details in these field notes. Thus the excerpts of the interactions with the participants
(both the consumers and shop owners in the markets and malls) maintained in the field notes were used in various portions of the chapters. Their views and opinions thus recorded in this form acted as valuable inputs in supporting as well as making observations from the study. When the respondents where interviewed using a schedule, their views and opinions were written down at that instance. This brought in a nature of transparency between the respondent and the researcher. From the structured interviews I was able to derive distinctive information like the age, gender compositions or the answers like their preferred shopping activities (window shopping, movies, eating out etc); similarly because of the maintenance of field notes from the unstructured interviews I was able to put in the views of the respondents of the specific aspects which otherwise would not have been recorded in the structured interviews.

However, at the other times, when my role was that of an unobtrusive observer, and I needed to make notes on the field, I could only do that after I left the field. This was because taking of field notes within the shops was not encouraged as it led to curiosity and suspicion among the customers which was not welcomed by the shop owners. Also the field notes were made to develop a detailed description of the mall environment, its architecture, colour, lighting and music that formed the background of the ethnographic study of the malls. Having discussed the methods involved in the study, the following section will provide a short summarization of what each chapter of this thesis will deal with.

1.3 Structure of the thesis: logical coherence of chapters

The work is divided into four main chapters of which the first two deals with mainly the theoretical orientations emphasizing the rise of the consumerism as the dominant feature in the western context, going on to discuss the changing socio-economic environment, in the context of India in general and Kolkata in particular. The last two chapters will deal with the changing concept of the nature of shopping with emphasis on the rise of the shopping mall as the new site of consumption. These chapters will be mainly involved in the field interpretations of the data and the interviews that
were conducted to study the effects of this new culture in Kollkata. A brief synopsis of each chapter will be given in order to have a clear understanding of the entire work.

1.3.1 Chapter Two- Sociology of Consumerism: Towards a theoretical exploration.

Chapter two of the thesis seeks answer to the fundamental question – what is sociological about the study of consumerism? In quest for an answer to that question, the study tries to first define the term ‘consumerism’ and goes on to an understanding of the uniqueness that distinguishes this ‘consumer culture’. It then moves on to give a historical and a theoretical view of the rise and development of the culture of consumption, as revealed in the works of the various theorists through the different ages. A detailed review of literature locates the inner conflicts raging among the various theorists, regarding the acceptability and the rise of this culture. So on one end, we have the works of the classical thinkers (Marx, Weber, Durkheim) for whom production gains predominance over consumption; while on the other end, are those thinkers for whom the study of consumption becomes a necessity, in understanding the new social changes which are produced due to the changes taking place from a Fordist to post-Fordist society. The development of this new phase of capitalism, which is characterized by market-driven and consumer oriented arrangements gained maximum success in the American society, which later went on to become the hub of the ‘culture of consumption’. The material possession, which was earlier valued for durability, now became priced for its fashion-ability. Another significant consequence of the growth of consumerism was the commercialization of leisure. Evidence of it was seen in the increasing interest in fashion, forms of entertainment like eating out, watching movies and engaging in shopping activities. This new culture was seen coming up as a global phenomenon, which had a tendency towards homogenization of consumer behaviour emerging on the axis of cosmopolitanism or Americanization. In this context, it should be maintained that from 1980s onwards a new sociological literature on consumption began to appear on themes such as taste and style, fashion, shopping etcetera.

A long tradition of literary works was contributed by various theorists starting from Veblen, Bourdieu to Fromm, who established that commodities stand for
desired social positions or properties more important than the needs and their satisfaction,
that the commodities represent (Leiss 1976). Interestingly there is no single dominant
theory of mass consumption but rather a range of theories, drawing from different
disciplinary traditions. So the emergence of this multi-disciplinary approach helped in the
evolution of a complex sociological literature on consumption and also towards a better
understanding and analyzing of the use and meanings of the goods and artifacts in
everyday life. A major contribution to the study of culture of consumption could not have
been completed without emphasizing the contribution made by Baudrillard. His work
included a critical understanding of the concept of consumption. So just as the concept of
consumption led to a focus on advertising, choice, money and shopping, similarly it also
points to a more sociologically adequate approach to material culture that explores
objects in a system of models and series, 'atmosphere', functionality, biography,
interaction and mediation. In this respect consumption is increasingly been looked upon
as not a passive activity but rather, as a system producing sign-values. Their work also
focuses on the rise of the city as a spectacle, which is perceived through the
transformations that the city has undergone as evident in new constructions in recent
times. The study concentrates in locating city, as the focus for cultural and socio-political
manifestations of urban lives and everyday practices. So this chapter entails theories that
deal with an understanding of the study of relationship between the consumer's creation
of self-identity and the symbolic significance of commodities, which help in the
construction of images.

1.3.2 Chapter Three - Consumerism in India: the changing profile of Kolkata

Having discussed in details, the existence of theoretical orientations on
consumerism, the study goes on to explore and study the rise of consumerism in
contemporary India, with special focus on Kolkata as the emerging hub of consumerist
culture. Liberalization and globalisation are the two major processes, which can be
treated as watersheds in these new socio-economic developments that engulfed the
country. As a result of these processes, the society witnessed major changes, which
resulted in a paradigm shift. This paradigm shift in nation-building resulted in two
phases; the first one took place when there was a shift from the Gandhian philosophy of swaraj, which was based on self austerity and restraint towards the Nehruvian concept of nation-building, based on socialism and collective well-being. The second paradigm shift took place when there resulted in a shift from the Nehruvian socialism to liberalized economy. This led to the rise of a new economy, which was governed by the principles of market forces of capitalism. The effect was enhanced by the entry of the multinationals and opening the doors for new and greater worldwide information. This created a new social milieu that began to alter the aspirations of the fast growing middle class. Whether by design or default, a series of governmental economic policies has helped to give birth to generation of Indians who have money to spend.

The new aspirations of the fast growing middle class were reflected in the consumerist culture, which was increasingly embraced by the masses. The effect of this new consumerist culture on the middle class therefore became a topic of discussion among the various scholars (Kothari 1991; Liechty 2002a, 2003). With the easy availability of the consumerist products, a particular social standard is created, which this middle class always aspires to reach. The new era of consumerism is marked by the inflow of transnational capital along with an inflow of information and desire. Commodity emerged as the strength of the nation. In this scenario, various theorists have explored the nature of the middle class. One view was that this new middle class came to be characterized as avaricious, insensitive and self-indulgent; while the other view regarded them as a dynamic class whose hunger for consumption spurs the economic growth. Thus contrary to the previous image, which was: "Be Indian. Buy Indian", the new slogan became To Buy is Indian (Rajagopal 1999, pp: 73). Thus a rise in the culture of consumerism was noticed with the expansion of this new middle class. The situation is complex whereby each one is related to the other, at the same time enhancing one another.

Having discussed the broader paradigm shift taking place in the development of the socio-economic structure of the Indian society at large, the focus goes on towards an understanding of the significance of these changes occurring in Kolkata. The area chosen for my study is Calcutta or Kolkata as recently renamed, reverting back to the name of the actual village of which Kolkata was made of. Kolkata is a city, which began
unlike other cities like Delhi, or Varanasi, as a city without a history\(^6\). It was born with British colonialism and rose to brief eminence during that era. The reference to the name of ‘Kalikata’ was seen in the era of the Great Mughal emperor Akbar. However the name gained prominence only during 1690s when Job Charnok came to buy the three adjoining villages to establish the trading post of British East India Company. These adjoining three villages namely, Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kolikata, together formed, what is now called Kolkata. During the colonial period, it grew up as a busy flourishing town and was the centre of cultural, political and economic life of Bengal. After the British left India, the city declined in status. Since then, until a few years ago, Kolkata, which had to undergo various struggles in the form of partition or the continuous refugee influx since the post-independence era till the 1970s, slowed down in the pace of development. This was followed by turmoil in the political sphere. The increasing influence and the gaining predominance of the Leftist struggle resulted in their political victory and their gaining of political power. Their orthodox orientation towards economic reforms initiated by the opening up of the economy, initially resulted in the restricted growth of West Bengal. As a result, the city was seen as a recluse for the aged, the retired, the solitude-loving and the old fashioned. However in recent times, with the changing orientations of the Leftist government policies, coined as the New Communism, there was a distinctive breakthrough in the economic policies, which aimed at a globalized economy, characterized by technological evolutions and free capital movements. It was then that consumerism hit Kolkata with a thud, and knocked the city flat out. Before the traditional bhadrolok\(^7\)

\(^6\) Historians in search of antiquity point out the reference to a village Kolkata in medieval texts, but the colonial city established there was a very different kind of social space.

\(^7\) This category of middle class resulted as a response to the needs of the British Empire. They were the product of the mercantile development of Calcutta, a development which gave rise to a class of bureaucrats who helped in the administrative jobs. The term is multivalent, but refers to “respectable people”. This category of people was distinguished by their refined behaviour and cultivated taste. This did not mean that they always possessed substantial wealth and power. They emerged as the new social group in the late eighteenth century in Bengal whose affiliates were the first to gain the benefits of the English education and thereby were able to get into urban professional occupations. Although they were originally from the upper castes, however in contemporary society there has been a blurring of this with a more heterogeneous nature as education opened up the opportunities for vertical mobility between castes. So in present context they have gained reputation as a distinct status group (more in the line of the Weberian concept of class) having the characteristics of heterogeneity and indigent. Education and correspondingly the access to professional occupations were the main factors behind the development of this class. Hence they have a distinctive cultural trait which distinguishes them from the other classes. Known as the connoisseurs of arts, music and writing this class has in present context come under the influence of conspicuous consumption. (McGuire 1983; Ganguly-Scrase 2003)
(gentleman) realized what was happening, Calcutta metamorphosed into Kolkata. This new face of the city is modern and techno-savvy. Thus it gained along with other metros to become a part of the 'global village'. As consumption grew, industry thrived and the job market in Kolkata benefited a cross-sectional population. So a city, which traditionally did not have a culture of consumption, was hit by the wave of consumerism, which was manifested in the changing structural and cultural character of the city. The most evident structural change was witnessed in the rise of shopping malls as new sites of consumption.

1.3.3 Chapter Four – Malls as sites of consumption

Chapters four and five include the empirical chapters of the thesis, which deal with the interpretations of the field data. The fourth chapter comes down to the main theme of the work and engages in an understanding of the shopping mall as a socio-cultural phenomenon. So it tries to understand the reasons why malls are generally assumed to be archetypal globalised spaces, which are also called ‘artifacts of globalisation’, meaning spaces in which the tendencies of homogenization and segregation of consumption are expressed. The chapter then indulges in a deeper understanding of the ethnographic description of the malls, which takes into account the architecture, space, and design that help in the development of the image of the mall as a magic world of capitalism. The ethnographic description is used in studying the mall’s interior decoration, which involves the interplay of colour, light, and music, creating an environment of utopia.

So the study tries to describe the environment of the three malls, which were taken up for study and then goes on to a comparative analysis amongst these three malls. Finally, the last section of the third chapter deals with the experiences of the respondents in the shopping malls, in terms of the socio-cultural aspects. In order to have a clear understanding of the perceptional changes among the people across the sections, classification was made on the basis of age and gender. Further classification was done on the basis of the employment status, nature of income of the respondents to factors like number of earning members in the family or the income range of the family, which helped in providing valuable information, regarding the perception of the mall as a shopping space. This chapter includes some of the excerpts from the interviews that were conducted.
with various consumers and the shop owners within the mall, which helped in drawing conclusions on the nature and type of consumers who frequent the malls, the reasons behind their visits to the mall and the various kinds of activities that these people are involved in inside the malls.

1.3.4 Chapter Five - Sociology of shopping

Chapter five continues on the same stream of thought and deals with the sociological aspect of shopping. In order to understand people's perception towards these new structures of consumption, the study required an understanding of the views and opinions of those consumers and shop owners who were involved in shopping activities in the markets rather than the shopping malls. Their views on the rise of the mall culture helped me, as a researcher, to gain an alternative view of the phenomenon. The perceptions of these respondents were a must for the study, as they helped in capturing those voices of protest which would otherwise not have been heard, if one restricted one's study within the mall periphery. So, in the beginning, the fourth chapter concentrated on understanding the concept of 'bazaar' or the street market shopping, which is an important part of Kolkata. The study then tries to capture the changing perception of the consumers towards the concept of shopping as an activity. It does so by referring how in the past, the people of Kolkata had a detached view towards the entire act of shopping which was predominantly regarded as a necessary activity. From there on to the recent times, the study tries to understand this changing perception of people towards the act of shopping, in how they regard it as a leisure and pleasure giving activity. It also takes into account, the impulsive buying behaviour of these consumers, which has been facilitated by the new shopping outlets. The interview mode helped in interacting with these consumers and shop owners, which went towards an understanding of the voice of the people of Kolkata. The last Chapter Six helps in bringing out the conclusions that have emerged out of the study.