Chapter Four: Malls as sites of consumption

"It is the transition from a culture based on the curbing of desires, thriftiness and the necessity of eking out goods in short supply to a new culture resulting from production and consumption at their highest ebb, but against a background of general crisis”.

—Henri Lefebvre

Having discussed in details the factors relating to the rise of consumer culture in the world in general and India in particular, the aim is to move on and understand the structures of consumption like the shopping mall in greater details. As a result this chapter will deal with the ethnographic understanding of the shopping mall as a site of consumption and also try to understand the socio-economic issues related in the understanding of the same. This is achieved through the in-depth interviews of the respondents visiting the mall and the shop owners who have their outlets within the shopping mall complexes.

4.1 Introducing the three malls in my study

Kolkata has come alive with activities related to the opening up of new industries and multinational companies, thereby making some radical changes in the consumption pattern of the city. This has led to some major changes in the socio-economic structure of the society. At the economic front, there has been an inflow of job opportunities, which has resulted in an increase in the purchasing power of a section of the mass. Moreover, it also seems that Kolkata is not lagging behind in adapting this new culture of consumerism that has gripped the rest of India and the World in general, the manifestations of which is seen in the rise in the number of shopping malls that has taken place in recent times. To grasp this new culture of consumption a study was required of the behaviour of consumers, who frequented these ‘temples of consumption’\(^89\). But this

\(^{89}\)The malls were also viewed as temples of consumption which has been referred by both Illich and Beth in their works. Illich Ivan. *Temples Of Consumption: Shopping Malls As Secular Cathedrals*, [http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/temples.html](http://www.trinity.edu/~mkearl/temples.html); Beth Gill: *The Temples of Consumption: Shopping Malls as secular Cathedral*, [http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/temples.html](http://www.trinity.edu/mkearl/temples.html), 31st May, 2007
again, would have made the study one sided, as it would not have included the views of those who generally visited the other markets. So, in order to have a holistic viewpoint through the study I tried to reach out to those consumers who went for shopping in the two major markets of Kolkata, i.e. the Gariahat Market and the New Market (formerly called the Hogg Market).

4.1.1 Forum Mall – the first shopping mall in Kolkata

The next stage in the research was the selection of specific malls for my survey. Though Kolkata has 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 basis of each mall’s selection will be revealed when they are talked about separately. The first mall under study is called the **Forum Mall**. Forum has been opted for my study because opened on 26th September, 2003 it was the first mall that was set up in Kolkata and by far, one of the most successful one. Despite the space constraints, the mall outsourced as the major outlet of both Indian designers along with international brands. The total rental space of Forum is at present around two lakhs square feet, with parking space in the underground basement area. With the increasing demand for space, the mall authority is also planning further expansion of its complex. In an interview in the Times of India, dated 11th August, 2007, the Forum developer Mr Rahul Saraf says: "Four years ago Forum ushered in the mall experience. Since then, the city has seen an economic splurge of retail revolution". So, due to the rise in the footfalls\(^90\) within the mall, the authorities have taken in new plans for its extension of the courtyard which will be of another 40,000 sq-ft with more shop outlets catering to international luxury brands. Along with this, there will be separate space of about 110,000 sq-ft which will be allocated for the development of a computerized ‘spiral car park’ to accommodate another 350 cars. This arcade project, which is estimated to cost about Rs 30-crores, is

\(^90\) Refers to the counting of the number of people visiting the mall per day. It is an approximate average of the number of people visiting the mall based on the total visitors within the complex. The footfall figure is regarded as an important indicator of the rate of success of the mall and is used in comparing the success rate vis-à-vis other malls.
targeted to be functional from 2008\textsuperscript{91} onwards. At present\textsuperscript{92} the average footfall according to the mall authority, is around 8000 persons/weekdays while during the weekends this number drastically increases to around 15000 persons. Though there is no distinction made among the mall visitors, there definitely lies an exclusion of a certain segment of the population mainly on the economic criterion\textsuperscript{93}. This mall is a consortium of all the best-branded products that one can think of, thus making it a shopper’s paradise. Moreover, the mall has been built in a very central location. It is situated at the heart of the city and is accessible both by good roadways as well as the metro rail service, which connects the entire city.

Coming to the architectural design of Forum, it has adapted the western model of mall architecture. For example, the entrance of the mall faces not the main road but the side street. By this, it tries to maintain the philosophy of the mall - privacy and the establishment of a euphoric world by negating the regular mundane activities. So, when a consumer enters the mall, she/he steps into a world of fantasy, which is a synthesis of colour, music, lights and display. All these bedazzling experiences help the respondent to be transcended into the commodity world which is dominated by goods and products.

This mall is built in a semi-circular shape where all the shops open out to a common passage. The entire building is under a single enclosure where the temperature is centrally-controlled. When one analyses the space utilization within the mall, one notices that, while constructing it, the mall authorities had kept in mind how the entire structure would facilitate shopping. As in any other mall, Forum too has places to sit, which act as the pause points for shoppers who take rest, review their programmes, plan their next course of action and rearrange their purchases. The sitting arrangements are made in such a way so as to provide the onlooker with a view of the section of shops. The seats are plain in order to discourage the shoppers from getting too comfortable to abandon the act of shopping. It also keeps in check those unwanted strollers from use the sitting arrangements for the purpose of idle pastime. The entire architecture focuses on

\textsuperscript{91} The target of the project was aimed for 2008 completion, which was according to the survey conducted on 2007.
\textsuperscript{92} This is according to the survey, which was conducted in year 2007.
\textsuperscript{93} Cohen (1996) talks about how the landscape of mass consumption creates a metropolitan society where the development of the commercial sub-centres like the shopping malls are based on the principles of exclusion based on class, gender and race stratification which was not prevalent in the marketplaces.
A panoramic view of the City Centre Mall showing the mall architecture

4.2 'Mall' – an artifact of 'globalisation'.

Since retailing and real estates are two most potent elements behind the gaining strength of America’s economy, with service and entertainment fast becoming growth industries of the future, shopping centres represent a major economic force. The shopping mall has several other terminologies like the shopping centres or shopping arcades which are more commonly used in Europe and Australia while shopping mall is more used in America. Despite the differences in the terminologies they have universal characteristics, which are same on the larger global sphere. So how does one define a shopping mall? It is not just a building or set of buildings that contain stores and have interconnecting walkways that make it easy for people to walk from store to store. The walkways may or may not be enclosed. Apart from their economic and financial significance, these malls have greater social significance as they are becoming a way of life. These meticulously planned, brightly coloured structures have taken the concept of
facilitating shopping and thereby discourages all those activities that would distract the consumers from their principle activity (Goss 1993, pp: 34).

Picture:1 The sitting arrangement in Forum Mall

![Picture of sitting arrangement in Forum Mall]

*Source: Snapshot taken at the mall by researcher*

However, the need to rest for a longer period is recognized by the authorities. As a result, there are sitting arrangements in the food court where the shoppers can take rest while at the same time, consume something. The food court has a multiple purpose to serve; it not only provides food and rest for the tired souls, but also acts as a vantage point for watching others display their commodified lifestyle. The importance of food court has been fully utilized in all the three malls that have been studied. As the prime motive of the mall owners is to facilitate shopping, hence, all steps are taken by the administration to maximize the same. For example, to cater to the needs of the mothers or families who bring along their children, the mall has a children’s corner where the parents can deposit their kids and enjoy shopping while the kids can have a good time playing with different toys and computer games. The children’s corner provides relief for these mothers/ parents who can enjoy their act of shopping. This was also even evident in the City Centre mall.
4.1.2 The Gariahaat Mall – the locational choice

The next mall which was taken up as a part of the study was the The Gariahaat Mall. Situated in the heart of the southern part of the city, The Gariahaat Mall is located at a very convenient position. An important striking feature of this mall is that it is located in close proximity to the Gariahaat Market which makes its study all the more interesting. The mall has been sited at a very convenient location which can be reached by roadways or even the local train that connects the suburban areas. Also, the bypass, which is a major connector to the city, is very close to the mall. The mall opens its gateways to the side road, and does not face the main road. This is one of the major aspects of the typical mall architecture. The entrance of the mall is impressive and has been constructed keeping in mind the traffic inflow into mall. So, one finds the huge driveway facilitating the car drivers to go for a comfortable parking in the basement of the mall.

The The Gariahaat Mall was opened on 23rd September 2005, which makes it more than two and half years since its inauguration. The mall has been built covering approximately 90,000 square feet, which is the total rental space. It was constructed by the Toplight Commercial Ltd, a company which is into retailing business in Kolkata. The Director of the project is Shri Kishore Singhani. As per the data provided by the mall authority the mall’s average footage differs on the weekends and weekdays. The average footage of the visitors over the weekdays is about 2000 to 2500 persons per day while on the weekends this number increases to about 4000 to 5000 persons per day.

The reasons for choosing this mall as a part of this study were due to 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 Gariahaat Market which 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 the mall.
- The constructions of other malls like the South City Mall, Highland Park, in near proximity of this mall pose as a threat to the malls’ footfall.
The Gariahaat Mall, is comparatively small vis-à-vis the other malls. This mall is in the shape of a semi circle where the floor plan of the second, third, fourth and fifth floor is such that the shops are in the form of a semi circle facing the main staircase.

While undertaking the study of 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 client of its own. Moreover, with the development of the Information Technology sectors in the vicinity (in and around Kasba) where companies have developed their own residential complexes, the proximity to this mall has resulted in its positive outcome. In other words, the mall’s target section can be classified three ways:

- d) the middle class Bengalis centred in and around the Gariahaat area
- e) the niche class of the Ballygunj area
- f) the IT personnels who are located around the Kasba and the Garia areas.

Another major aspect, which made the study of this mall interesting, is its proximity to the Gariahaat Market, which is considered to be a shopper’s 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 as an ideal spot to shop where one finds a huge range of shops catering to the demands of people from all socio-economic strata. So the normal question that comes up in this respect is, whether the location of such a marketplace poses a threat to the mall. When this issue was brought up through interaction with the various interviewees, who included both the mall authorities as well as the shop owners, they unanimously had the same explanation. All of them felt that the mall caters to particular stratum of people who are conscious of the quality and the brand of products. Also, the mall has shops, which are affordable to a large cross section of people. Moreover the customer is made available to a large section of selected
items under a single roof. This attracts a lot of buyers as they do not have to waste time hopping from one place to another. Further they felt that the mind-set of the people is changing at a very fast pace which has led them to adapt to this new culture of shopping in the mall as an alternative to markets.

The Gariahaat Mall is much smaller in area in comparison to the other malls like City Centre and Forum. However, in spite of space limitations, the shopping space has been efficiently used up to accommodate approximately 45-50 shops. The mall comprises of five floors with accommodation at the basement for parking. Of these floors, the Lower Ground Floor has a huge grocery cum retail shop: C3, while the Upper Ground Floor has Westside and Gatha which are both garment shops. Similarly the entire space of the First Floor is taken up by two shops Square 1 and Westside again. From Second Floor onwards, one finds the space of the mall being divided into various smaller spaces. The shops depending on their space requirements and budget, hire these spaces. So, one finds diversity of shops catering to different items from music to children’s goods to accessories, garments etc. The topmost floor of the mall has a food court which caters to the consumers who come in for a quick bite. The food joint does not go in for an elaborate food menu. This suggests that the idea behind the food court is to facilitate the consumers/mall visitors to grab a quick bite before continuing their shopping or activity. There are no other restaurants which cater an elaborate meal.

One of the interesting features of this mall is that it lacks a movie theatre within its complex. When asked about this, the mall authorities explained that firstly, because of the shortage of space in the mall, it was not possible for them to have a movie theatre within its complex. A movie theatre would have taken a lot of space, which has otherwise been used for the purpose of renting out to the retailers. Secondly, they wanted to concentrate more on shopping as a primary activity and felt that presence of a movie theatre might dilute the main objective of the mall. So according to their data, the average footage in the mall on both weekdays and weekends comprises of those who visit the mall mainly for the purpose of buying items and not just for the sake of ‘watching movies’ or ‘eating out’.
The Gariahaat Mall has been functional since a little more than one year. However, it is not the only one which is found in South Kolkata. Within a span of two to three years since The Gariahaat Mall was established, a number of other malls have come up or due for completion. Of these the major ones are the Highland Park and the South City Mall, the latter is planned for opening in year 2007 while the former has already been opened. Moreover, with the rate of retail business gaining its roots in Kolkata, in a few years down the line, there would be a flourish of few more malls. In view of these malls which are due to open shortly, the major concern for the owners of The Gariahaat Mall would have been 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.

4.1.3 City Centre Mall – a hybrid mall

The last mall, which was taken for study, was 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 hub of Kolkata. It has progressed into becoming the Information Technology hub of the city with concentration of all the major corporate offices as well as some of the government offices. A section of the Salt Lake area is residential, around which the City Centre is located. In recent times, the area has witnessed planned developments which have facilitated the growth of various recreational centres like the fun parks and shopping malls. Salt Lake in itself was located near 10-12 kms from the main city and it lacked good shopping complexes. Hence, the construction of City Centre as a shopping mall has immensely facilitated the people of the surrounding places. The mall, opened on 5th June, 2004, was constructed as a joint venture by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority and Gujarat Ambuja Cements Limited. The total rental space is approximately 3 lakhs square feet. The average footfall of the mall during the weekdays is about 10,000-12,000 persons per day while it increases to about 20,000-30,000 persons per day during the weekends.
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 behind its making. When one looks at the architecture of this mall one will realize that the vast multiplex plaza has been designed with 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 family. This also provides a platform for interaction, where people from various groups, ages and backgrounds mingle with each other. It thus, is 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 brought in just 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’ and the concept of consumerism within the complex of this mall. The mall architecture thus tries to capture the spirit of Kolkata in the confinements 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, in his design of this mall has borrowed generously from two Indian experiences- the bazaar life and the need for social interaction. He tried beautifully to mix in these two elements and has, to a great extent, been successful in doing so. The result is evident in the construction of a mall which, through its horizontal layout, neat straight lines, pastel shades, and airy ambience, is seen more as a destination mall than a convenience mall. Its ‘seamless connection’ with the streets surrounding the mall has managed to draw even those people who otherwise would have avoided entering malls because of their prohibitive expensive airs. City Centre has around 250 establishments, catering to a vast array of consumer needs. So, in the words of the promoter of City Centre, Mr Harshavardhan Neotia of Bengal Ambuja

94 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 centric only on the youth but cut across age-sex barriers.
as said in the interview: “We actually knocked down the boundary walls to make City Centre a more inclusive plane, which would not keep out the common man”. To keep up with the bazaar look, it has as many as fourteen entry and exit points, and the passages between buildings are not air-conditioned. This feature of this mall, which is unique in itself, is the way the building has been constructed. The entire complex has been built over a sprawling area of around 4,00,000 sq feet. It is situated at a very convenient location facing the main road. There are no boundaries secluding it from the public view. Thus by nature, it tries to defy the mall architecture. The mall complex is neither under a single enclosure nor is its environment artificially controlled and it is, therefore, unlike a typical mall. Rather, this mall has a unique quality in its openness, which supports its inclusiveness in this study. This kind of structure is called a ‘hybrid mall’ (Mander cited in Martin and Turley, 2004) where mall includes both enclosed and open areas in the same architectural form. In some areas these hybrid malls have evolved into the concept of the Mall meets High Street. It is based on the philosophy of inclusiveness and hence there is no restriction based on age, income and social background. This mall thereby tries to cater to the needs of different segments of society. So, City Centre is not just the confluence of various outlets of designer wear, jewellery shops, coffee shops, departmental stores and multiplex theatre; it is a mall where there is a confluence of care and compassion along with the culture of consumerism. This is what makes the study of this mall so unique from that of any other shopping complex and hence is an important part of this research.
one-stop shopping into a virtual one-stop culture, providing the consumers with a cornucopia of products culminating into the development of a social identity. So much so that they are no longer seen as mere locations for consumption; rather, they have gone on to become the signature structures of the age. This is reflected in the words of a business editor in Atlanta Journal, "If you had to pick one thing that would typify civilization in the U.S. in the twentieth century, a front running candidate would be the suburban shopping mall." (Kowinski 1985, pp: 26).

Malling practice, which slowly started in America, spread its tentacles to other parts of the world. Thereby it transcended its shopping-centre origins and has developed as a global phenomenon. Throughout the world, malls share the common features of aesthetics, architecture and design. Functional necessity may explain some of the uniformity. It may also be because the international characteristic of the mall is maintained in order to make it stand out as a global structure wherever it is located. That is also the reason why malls are generally assumed to be archetypical globalised spaces. de Mattos (1999 cited in Salcedo 2003) has called them ‘artifacts of globalisation’, meaning spaces in which the tendencies of homogenization and segregation of consumption are expressed. A striking feature of the malls is the structural similarity that exists in their construction. Malls are geographically bound expressions of a negotiation between mall developers as representatives of a global logic of capitalist accumulation on one hand, and local characteristics on the other. As a result, when one studies these malls in the context of specific countries, it becomes clear that they are the outcome of the process of ‘globalization’. This process combines the post-Fordist capitalist logic of mass production and at the same time takes in the local political, social and cultural influences of a particular country thereby bringing in significant variations. While undertaking the study of the malls in Kolkata, for example, this became prominent. Malls in Kolkata have tried to adapt themselves to the local culture of the region so as to gain a broader acceptability among the masses. As to how this was done, will be shared in details when we talk about the three specific malls, which have been studied. Meanwhile, going back to the concept of global-meets-local at the mall, it can be said that these adjustments become a necessity because malls are not merely seen as retail places for consumption. Reality is far more complex as malls help to fulfill many psychological needs of the
visitors as they act as a place for social interaction and even relaxation. Interestingly, while constructing malls, the owners are also aware of the needs that malls fulfill and they try to help in maximum realization of the same. For that they create facilities like the multiplex theatres, food courts etc where people can enjoy themselves even while shopping. For each of these facilities, the consumers are required to pay for the use, thus keeping the wheels of consumption in motion. In continuing along the lines of this viewpoint, it is however seen that malls might be characterized as globalised spaces with an internal logic based on a free market ideology and an understanding that some elements of the local can be used as tools to promote consumption and profit.

Thus the theatrical aspect of shopping is represented in its fullest advantage within the confines of the shopping mall. The success of the mall is based on the fact that it does not rely only on the sole purpose of shopping and eating. Even though the mall has a hidden agenda of selling products, it does not restrict itself to being merely the seller of goods and commodities. Providing recreation is another motive of the malls. So the mall authorities tie up with various traditional, cultural and entertainment media in order to not only provide entertainment to the customers but also to be successful in drawing large crowds within its compound as a result of the events. Thus it also tries to have a cultural platform through which various events are organized to help in attracting crowds. The social, cultural and political particularities present challenges and opportunities to the ‘normal’ ways of developing and managing a global artifact such as a mall. These adaptations are important because they help to smoothen the functioning of the system, which may otherwise be working only on economic principles. A study of the malls in Kolkata will reveal the stories of success and failures of these various malls, which have followed these principles, based on diversifications.

95 In the Free market or free economy or free enterprise economy, the greater part of the activities of production, distribution and exchange are conducted by private individuals or companies rather than by the government, and government intervention is kept to a minimum.
4.3 Ethnographic description of the shopping malls

Market places have always played an important role in man’s life, as have been the places where not only economic activities play a predominant role, but also some of the other social relations have evolved there based on cultural, political, ethnic or even gendered aspects. Hence its evolution has also been an area of study for the social scientists in general, and sociologists in particular. The sociologists therefore were preoccupied with the understanding the dynamics of the social relations and interactions, which went on between the buyer and sellers within these economic structures of the marketplaces. Since ancient times, marketplaces have also witnessed various changes in their nature and structures of which the development of the shopping malls have been an important breakthrough. These developments encompassed multifaceted changes in the structural as well as in the environmental character of the markets. A detailed understanding of these structures, which were often called ‘temples of consumption’, can be achieved through an ethnographic description of the same, which will focus on the mall’s architecture, its ambience, and the characteristic of the mall in operation. Hence the study will try to understand how mall is seen as a magic world of capitalism, and then proceed to a detailed understanding with regards to the structural features of the mall like the architectural design, space and design, followed by the study of the environmental aspects within the mall looking at factors like cleanliness, which gives the mall its distinctive characteristics.

4.3.1 Mall as a magic world of capitalism

With the gradual growth of the consumer culture in the modern era, urban landscape experienced new changes in the retail investment. In the preceding chapter, a brief history of the retail development was outlined which took place in the form of the Parisian arcades and the departmental stores. This transformed the character of the city by developing it into a place of ‘consumption’ from that of ‘production’. The Paris Arcades, which were built in the early 19th century, were thus regarded as the origin of the modern commercial complex that one now terms as the shopping mall. The arcades were the first
international style of modern architecture, and hence a part of the lived experience of a worldwide, metropolitan generation. By the end of the 19th century they had become the hallmark of a ‘modern’ metropolis (as well as western imperial domination). Constructed like a church, in the shape of a cross these arcades were privately owned, publicly traversed passages displaying commodities in window showcase. The same trend is followed in the postmodern era, with the intensifying of this consumerist culture. As a result, shopping as an activity gained new dimensions. It witnessed further development in the nature of the market place, with shopping malls replacing the arcades and departmental stores, bringing in a culture of opulence and flamboyance. It also brought along the element of ‘magic’, which the consumers refer to in describing the experience that they undergo in visiting the mall. Like arcades, malls too reproduce fairy tales where the transformation of scale occurs in both gigantism and miniaturism (Goss 1993 and 1999). As a result, consumers, while entering the mall space, willingly suspend their perception of reality and enter the world of prepackaged spectacle. The merging of the physical environment, the space and all its trappings, together with the individual’s desire to become a part of the process is unique as well as powerful in its impact. There are several factors that enhance the creation of the world of magic; of these, the relationship to physical environment is the most potent; however, factors like age and gender also contribute in their own way to the spectacle of shopping as an act of entertainment. A detailed study on these factors will be taken up in the following section. Thus, the introduction of the new means of marketing structures indicated a shift in the nature of the commercial activity from purchases made on the basis of need towards purchasing of products on the basis of desire. This change took place also because of the changes that resulted in the structure of the stores. The new glass architecture with its rows of display window and grand light corridors brought about a new totality in the form of the labyrinth space of the arcades with their small shops. Benjamin in his conception of the arcades explained how:

"...these passages, a new discovery of industrial luxury, are glass-covered, marble-walled walkways through entire blocks of buildings, the owners of which have joined together to engage in such a venture. Lining both sides of these walkways which receive their light from above are the most elegant of commodity shops, so that such an arcade is a city, a world in miniature".

He studied how this new space of shopping affected the shoppers who flocked the stores from various levels of society. Thus he writes: “For the first time in history with the founding of the departmental store consumers begin to experience themselves as a mass....” (Benjamin cited in Lungstrum 1999, pp: 124). It was only after 1880s, that there was the introduction of the huge plate-glass windows which showed off phantasmagoric\(^\text{96}\) products to passer-by (Buck-Moss 1991; Friedberg 1993; Shields 1992). Marx had used the term to refer to the deceptive appearance of commodities as ‘fetish’ in the marketplace. For Benjamin, the point of departure was a philosophy of historical experience rather than economic analysis of capital. The key to the new urban phantasmogoria was not so much the commodity-in-the-market, as the commodity-on-display. This phantasmogoria reached its apogee with its international expositions. Wide span of glass windows originated in the arcades, as did window shopping as the activity of the flâneur. This revolutionized the shopping experience for the consumers who could now spend their time by looking at the displayed items, apart from buying the products. So, when a shopper walked into these departmental stores or the arcades, she/he came under visual and sensory contact with a wide array of products. These products titillated

\(^{96}\) Phantasmogoric or Phantasmogoria is a magic-lantern show of optical illusions, rapidly changing size and blending into one another.
some of the hidden desires of the individuals which often led to the purchase of products. Even the act of 'just looking' and 'feeling' the products became a leisure-time activity for many shoppers and was considered a necessary part of the culture of consumption. It is in this context that visualizing culture represented a shift of focus in understanding shopping as a consumption centric activity. Shopping became an exercise in pleasure and diversion\textsuperscript{97}. So, to trace the historicity of the shopping malls in the western society (read American society), it was important to understand the changing socio-spatial and cultural scenario, which facilitated the development of such mammoth structures of consumption.

A major point that came up while studying the development of the malls was in respect to their locations. While the arcades and departmental stores were found to be located in the heart of the hustle and bustle of city life, shopping malls were constructed away from the city life, preferably in the sub-urban or the hinterland areas of major cities. The reason behind shifting from the city was the requirement of ample space in the construction of the complexes. With space not being a constraint in such areas (which would have been impossible in congested cities), the shopping centres indulged themselves in displaying and stretching their creativity to the maximum limit. This resulted in the construction of sprawling mega malls that became the centre of hub of shopping and leisure activity. Unreconciled to the suburban topography and separated from the city by its own architectural composition, the mall takes the shape of a fortress guarding itself from the choking, surging violence of the late modernist cities (Backes 1997; Crawford 1992). It provides an interlude or an escape from the hassles of the city life where people come to indulge in the pleasures of consumption. Thus mall can be viewed as a space that is created which, owing to its architectural design, is separated from the outside world. This space that is created has the ability to make magic; hence malls have often earned the names of being the 'house of fantasy'. Such is the power of this illusion that often many shoppers have commented on how a short trip has extended for a couple of hours, once they are within the confines of the mall. So people often stay for no good or apparent reasons, even beyond their conscious desires as within its real walls and psychological illusions the mall provides a feeling of comfort and security from the outside world.

\textsuperscript{97} The concept of just looking was mainly brought out from the works of Rachel Bowlby's called \textit{Just Looking}, which she used in linking up her ideas about 19\textsuperscript{th} & early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century commerce to the naturalistic novel. Her ideas were cited by Backes (1997) in her work on \textit{Reading the Shopping Mall City}. 

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The mall is thus an illusion, which represents a utopian future that casts a spell of enchantment on the visitors. These malls were constructed for multidimensional purposes of which shopping was one of the many aspects. The construction of the shopping malls in the suburban areas was facilitated by some of the intervening factors like the growth of the automobile industry and the development of the infrastructural facilities like the construction of highways, which helped in linking the city with the surrounding suburban areas. As a result, there was greater dependence on private means for commuting to these malls. This in turn, made the malls accessible to only a select class, who had the private ownership of automobiles, resulting in exclusivity in the nature of consumption.

4.3.2 Mall – its architecture, space and design

The nature of the changes in the mall architecture has resulted in a greater inflow of visitors. Earlier, malls were constructed without an enclosure due to which there was certain openness in the architectural form. However since 1950s mall architecture underwent changes. Malls were created within an enclosure thereby bringing in artificial control and regulation of temperature. The enclosed shopping mall tends to suspend time, space and weather. It is interesting to see that in terms of architectural structure, there exists a similarity among the shopping malls across the nations. These malls are based on a galleria or arcade of boutiques that are based on a semi circular floor area with shops opening to an empty, common space. The entire space is covered with dumb-bell shaped covering at the top. Each floor is well connected by spacious corridors and escalators efficiently leading the onlookers and shoppers from one floor to the other. The aim of the construction is to maintain a steady flow of the shoppers, window shoppers, and strollers. At each level, a variety of small shops caters to the sensuous and aesthetic needs of the body.

Though the suburban areas were well connected by the roadways, most of them lacked the frequency of public transport which became cumbersome for those relying on them, as a result de-motivating those shoppers. Also those residing in the suburban areas also felt some form of exclusion during their visit to these shopping malls. To enhance this further a study was taken on the use of the private verses public transport while commuting to the malls which will be taken up in the latter part of the study.
Inside the complex, each store tries to maintain exclusivity and uniqueness in its style of presentation so as to be able to capture the 'gaze'\textsuperscript{99} of the consumers or onlookers. All the shops are usually 'hermetically' sealed with plate-glass windows and doors. The lightening and staging of the shops are used to enhance the appeal of produce, the props and sets are employed to accent what would have been otherwise dismissed as prosaic. The onlookers have an unrestricted vision of the interior of the shop where they can have a look at the nature of the products displayed. As malls became enclosed in their structure, these became very important in maintaining the

\textsuperscript{99} The 'look' or viewpoint inherent in particular cultural product. The concept originated in the work of Mulvey (1975), 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' where he suggested that most films are made by males and the gaze of films is usually to objectify women- voyeuristically and stereotypically—from the viewpoint of male spectator. Subsequently the word has broadened its meaning to also encompass the female gaze (Jary and Jary 2000).
balance in the environment. Lighting plays a very important but subtle role within the mall. Indoor lighting is soft in order to prevent glare on glass fronts of the shops and also not to mar the products. Care is taken to highlight the natural colours of the products on display. Light act as “silent salesmen...[which] showcase the most pricey merchandise to stellar advantage and transform the most pedestrian goods into must-haves” (Connor 1989 cited in Goss 1993, pp: 32). Music\textsuperscript{100} also plays an important role in the mall, as it fills in the silence and soothes shoppers while they undergo the process of shopping or browsing. Mirrors and reflective glass add to the decorative multiplication of images and colour and also give an illusionary character by doubling the space. The aim is to provide maximum comfort within the mall so that the visitors are transcended into a world that is dominated by goods and desire. From designer clothes to fashionable food, smart look predominates, leaving no space for things which are mundane in nature. The interior of the mall is an accrual of vivacious colour, neon lights, marble skylight arcades, soaring ceiling heights which all culminate in creating a vision of grandeur and sumptuousness. There is exclusivity in its nature which is communicated through the behaviour or sometimes, even through the décor of the shop. The same glass doors that allow the onlookers a glimpse of the products, may also act as barriers of intimidation to browsers who might not be able to buy the expensive goods. It is seen that the décor of the shops changes with the price and exclusivity of the nature of the products. Showcasing of selective items in an otherwise empty setting creates the aura of exclusivity, which acts as a barrier for those who do not have the means to buy the same. Another aspect which often intimidates a buyer is the over attentiveness of the sales persons. It is the entire environment that helps the buyer in purchasing the products. So in a mall, there are both the expensive showrooms along with other products, each catering to a special clientele of its own. This harmonious existence is a typical product of the postmodern architecture, which is seen in the shopping mall. All these have facilitated in not only making the shopping experience a more pleasurable activity, but also bringing in certain exclusivity in the nature of the same. Within the confines of the mall, there exists a feeling of timelessness (Goss 1993), which urges the consumers to forget the outside world and

\textsuperscript{100} Psychoanalysts have pointed out the positive role played by music in a shopping mall, as it helps sooth shoppers in an anesthetic or tonic aural fluid (Boorstin 1961 cited in Goss 1993, pp: 32)
merge into the world of goods. This mall space is special as it lies completely separated from the external world. It has its own world, which is pulled out of time and space. It not only takes the form of a windowless fortress but also enclosed in a more profound sense with all the elements (light, sound, space etc) psychologically separating it from the outside world, creating a domain within itself. It is meant to be its own special world with its own rules and reality. This is surprisingly the first and the most essential secret of the design of a shopping mall. Mall design is so made to trap the consumers into this space meant for consumption. Hence the exit and entrance of the malls cannot be easily located. Modern shopping mall is literally a utopia, a colourful and well-lit ‘wonderland of consumption’. Jameson (1984), Boyer (1994 cited in Goss 1999, pp: 47) along with Benjamin (cited in Goss 1993, pp: 33) saw this ‘hyperspace’ as a metaphor for global capitalism. According to Jameson, this sign-saturated place and its constant motion represent the spatial and temporal displacement, characteristic of the postmodern world. This meta-structure exposes the consumers to a consortium of products and offers them the opportunity to make impulsive purchases. In the words of Simon:

"[T]o walk in the contemporary place of pleasure, the shopping mall is to walk through the avenues of postmodern mentality. What we see, neatly symbolized and codified, are both the promises and problems of commodity life. It is only a matter of learning how to read the meaning of space"[101]

The very first thing that strikes one immediately on entering the mall-space is its penchant for cleanliness, besides the dazzle of display. This is one of the most important prerogatives of any mall that sets it apart from any other shopping complex and bazaars. The mall authorities also take proper care in maintaining the hygiene within the mall. So if one chances upon a mall during its early hours, one would encounter the housekeeping staff busy with their rigorous routine of keeping the mall spick and span. This round-the-clock cleaning lends the mall a distinctive character. It also acts as one of the prime reasons for many shoppers for preferring mall over the other places of shopping, as it gives them respite from the filth and stench that one encounters while shopping in a bazaar. Moreover, shopping in a hygienic condition in contrast to the jostling sweaty crowds is an added bonus for a hassle-free shopping. Recent times have

witnessed a changing perception towards shopping emerging as a leisure and pleasure activity in contrast to being a necessary one. As a result people are spending more quality time in shopping which makes them attentive towards the shopping environment. This makes the mall gain an advantage over the bazaars in luring and occupying the shoppers within its confines. The mall design conveys an image, an ideal, of a small, controllable environment that is quiet, clean and almost representing a surgical milieu. The obsessive preoccupation in maintaining the sanctity and cleanliness of the mall environment accords it the status, where it is often compared to a ‘temple of consumption’. The reference of ‘temple’ conveys the image of reverence, peace and awe. The shopping mall, through its architectural construction and maintenance, helps in reflecting several such contrasting images which invoke the feelings which were never, a part of the ‘traditional’ shopping places like bazaars.

4.3.3 Flâner and the Mall

As central institutions in the realm of consumption, shopping malls try to continuously restructure both the products and behaviour into new combinations, which would help in facilitating deeper penetration of the commodities into an individual’s life. The consumer comes inside the mall with a set of “confused set of wants” (Crawford 1992, pp: 12; Miller 1987). Mall owners try to use this state of confusion to maximize their own profits which they do, by effectively mediating between the shoppers and the commodity. The shopper is presented with an array of products, each of which promises a specialized satisfaction out of which the shopper needs to select his/her preferences. Objects emanate characteristics and signals which try to capture the consumer’s fluctuating desires. As a result, the shopper is forced to fragment his/her needs so as to include some and exclude others (Leiss 1976). Thus by extending the period of ‘just looking’, the shopping malls encourage cognitive acquisition where the shoppers mentally acquire commodities by familiarizing themselves with a commodity’s actual and imagined qualities. This gives the consumer the scope to understand the latent desires of the self. It not only makes them aware of what they are but also gives them the satisfaction in understanding what they can become. At the same time, the endless variation of objects also makes them understand the insatiability of ‘wants’. It draws our
attention to the fundamentally contradictory characteristics of shopping mall - stimulating nebulous desire at one end and encouraging specific purchases at the other.

**Picture: 7 Flâneur: the aimless stroll**

![Image of a mall with people walking around]

*Source: Snap shot taken at the mall by researcher*

In the social formation of modernity, the modernized gaze was restricted to the realm of the arcades, which later on stretched on to encompass the departmental stores and finally the shopping malls. Since the mid nineteenth century onwards, with the development of new modes of shopping centres, there resulted a transformation of this gaze into a commodity, which was sold to the consumer-spectacle. Thus the origin of the mobilized gaze is situated within the paradigm of modernity, in the conception of the “flâneur”\(^{102}\). This mobilized gaze entered the service of consumption. Benjamin (cited in Freidberg 1991) traces the flâneur from the arcades to the departmental stores. To quote Benjamin: “*[the construction of the department store....made use of flâneur itself in order to sell goods. The department store was the flâneur's final coup]*” (Friedberg 1991, pp: 421). So how did Benjamin perceive flâneur? Flâneur, was the progress of a voyeuristic dandy who strolled along the streets and arcades of Paris in the nineteenth

\(^{102}\) Benjamin, the initiator of the concept in his work One Way Street (1928; translated in English in 1979) has since then been referred to by various thinkers (Shields 1992; Friedberg 1993) in their work on this issue. The positive aspect of this term lies in its gender neutrality, and its aptness in explaining a lost form of public behaviour and personal expression. In the new era of shopping mall flâneur has however undergone a feminization process as shopping in the malls were seen predominantly as a female activity.
century. However for Benjamin (1979 cited in Featherstone 1998), flâneur is not just the stroller in the city, but is a method of reading text. It is also a method of writing, producing and constructing texts, which help in understanding the global character of the marketplace. Flâneur is a social type, which points towards the centrality of the locomotion in social life. A stroller, during his walk through the streets, is constantly bombarded with new streams of experience which helps him in developing new perceptions about the city life. The flâneur develops his aesthetic sensibility in the swings between involvement and detachment, between emotional immersion and the decontrolled and moments of careful recording and analysis of random harvest of impressions from the streets. This is neither an inherited skill nor a natural gift; rather it entails pedagogy. According to Shields ".....the flâneur is a native who becomes a foreigner" (1994; cited in Featherstone 1998 pp: 914). In contemporary times, the flâneur retains its significance outside and within the confines of various architectural types, of which shopping mall is a classic example. The postmodern city with its wide diversities brought by the process of globalisation, in turn enriches and extends the scope and variety of impressions, which creates an impact on the flâneur. Thus, according to Benjamin "The department store is the flâneur's last haunt" (Featherstone 1998, pp: 914). Shields (1989 cited in Woodward et al 2000, pp: 339) takes this notion further and explains how the postmodern space of shopping mall encourages the practice of flânerie. According to Shields, the architectural potency of the mall along with the lure of commodity produces a kind of frenetic consumerist zombie.

"We are animated into agitated motion by the commodities and the architectonic features of the mall. No longer quite in control, one becomes a drifting 'mall-walker', one's body is drawn by nonverbalized desires and attracted by curiosity as much as directed by a rational goal-oriented project".

(Shields cited in Woodward 2000, pp: 341)

With the development of the malls as the new site of shopping, there did not result any change in the style of the flâneur. Thus his perceptual patterns, distracted observation and dreamlike reverie became the prototype for those of the consumer, whose style of “just looking” is similar to a pedestrians walk. (Freidberg 1991). The space created within the mall, facilitates the consumers to take a leisurely stroll and watch the people interact on a public forum, which was on the same line of the flâneur.
However, the contemporary flâneur cannot escape the imperative to consume, as the mall does not have provisions for aimless loitering. It is true that entering a shopping mall does not always result in the purchase of commodities. However, it is interesting to note that there is a lot of interplay of visual and psychic pressure that a consumer undergoes once she/he is within the mall boundaries. As the saying goes: “I shop therefore I am” but also “I am what I buy” (Freidberg 1991, pp: 424); those who do not buy anything pay a psychic penalty—which is nothing but the displeasure of insatiable consumer desires. This raises questions on the entire existence of the consumer, thereby instigating himself/herself in the act of consumption.

4.3.4 Mall Space: a Public verses Private contention

While talking about mall as a space of consumption, a very strong notion of public-private space comes into the realm. By virtue of its scale, design and function, shopping malls often appear to be public spaces, more or less open to anyone. This appearance is important for the mall to be a success because the idea behind their construct is to attract as many consumers as possible and encourage them in spending their time within its confines. At the same time, one should not forget that a mall is not a free market; neither is it a public space. Malls are under private ownerships and anything that might lead to any disruption in the transaction process is not welcomed here. It is seen as a private property, owned and maintained by the developers and hence they exercise coercive centralized authority within its boundaries. The theme of their design is enclosure, protection and control. Thus the mall space is special as it is protected, thereby banishing outside threats of disruptions and distractions. Such is the extent of protection that its structure even tries to restrict nature’s intervention, which is manifested in the controlled atmosphere. They are never aimed at any civic activities. Hence vagrancy, political speeches, charitable activities are never encouraged within the complexes. Tight vigilance is maintained by the authorities so as to control irregular behaviour of groups or individuals. For the consumers however, the space of malls is public where they interact with the society at large. Hence malls are often the favourite place of hang-out for the teenagers, college goers or recluse for the elderly retired individuals. Similarly,
housewives also seem to favour spending their time in the leisurely activity of shopping or eating out at the malls. Mall provides a safe environment; as a result, housewives feel relaxed while spending their time at the mall. For the owners and the staff however, the space is private as they spend their everyday life within its confines. So, from their point of view, it is their private space which is being invaded by strangers i.e. the consumers and onlookers. Hence, they guard their space in a very subtle manner. This indicates how the dilemma of public and private is very much present in the shopping malls (Jackson 1996; Shields 1992). In spite of the complexities in understanding the social space of the shopping mall, we find that what started out as a purely commercial venture rapidly became subverted to social uses. The social character of the mall in no case can be negated during the study. So, places like this nurture the soul and society and not just the body and economy. Thus, malls no longer were just seen as space for buying goods; they became a space where people could spend ample time browsing and socializing or even engaging in leisure activity. This fulfilled the aim of the sellers which was to keep the shopper within the mall for the maximum time. Hence from amusement or theme parks to multi screen movie theaters, post office to restaurants and food courts – all were created to provide all the basic amenities of life. The whole idea of this psychological structure is to turn off one’s mind and let one float, thereby to create a direct and unfettered connection between eyeing and buying. Thus the malls make for great eye/hand-on-credit-card coordination. The way it is done is with a combination of peacefulness and simulations. The environment bathes you in sweet neutrality with soft light, mellowed music and all the amenities that reassure and please without grabbing too much individual attention. At the same time the stores and products dance for you with friendly smiles and colourful costumes. The sheer number of products and experiences, which one pays for their apparent variety, are in themselves factors that excite and focus.

103 It refers to the electronic copying or modeling of unique objects. Baudrillard used this concept to explain how contemporary society is saturated with electronic models and versions of unique objects so that distinctions between reality and fiction are no longer valid.
4.4. Shopping Malls in Kolkata: a study of its ethnographic environment

This section of the study will discuss the shopping mall’s design, structure and later on develop a comparative study of the three malls in terms of each of their distinctive features.

4.4.1 Forum Mall - a study of its design and space

Within the three zones of study in our present discussion on the malls of Kolkata, the first one that immediately comes to mind is the Forum, the first of its kind in the city, breaking the traditional concept of a marketplace. When one steps into the premises of this mall, nestling in the heart of the city, one marvels at the precision with which it adheres to the ideal, typical construction of a mall as depicted in the western context. Located in the stretch of the Elgin Road, some distance from the bustling commotion of the broader Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Road, Forum creates a world of its own. There are three entrances to its interiors – front, back and a side entrance, of which the first two open into the confines of the Shoppers’ Stop, which occupies a major portion of the Ground, First and Second and Third floors of the mall. It is therefore the side entrance, quite inconspicuous in its presence, which lets one into the central area of the mall.

Picture: 8 The entrance of the Forum Mall

Source: Snap shot taken at the mall by researcher
Suddenly a magic world of colour, light and eye catching displays tempts one's senses setting the right ambience for a day out. Entering the central space, one comes across the imposing three-layered escalators carrying one to the successive floors deeper into the magical world of commodities. The ground floor is predominated by showrooms catering to sports wear owned by noted international brands like Adidas, Woodland, United Colours of Benetton and Nike along with shops for kids like Candy Treats and Little Shop. What holds a viewer's attention is the wide array of displays encased in glass-panelled showrooms. Each showroom is distinctive in its display, in line with the nature of the products that it sells. The distinction is evident through the use of colour, light and thematic presentation of the products. For example, the glittering array of crystals and beads, enhancing the latest trends in female footwear is extremely eye-catching, the moment one glances at the shop 'Soles'. In contrast, the shops showcasing the sportswear items have a definite air of masculinity. The multi-coloured assortment of candies in 'Candy Treats' with its fluorescent lights have a fairy tale ambience hard for any child to resist.

Taking the flights of stairs up to the first floor, the space ensconces a wide array of boutiques and international brands in accessories. So a Ritu Kumar comfortably nestles with 'Swarovski' crystals. The second and the third floors are predominantly involved in selling western wear and accessories. Interestingly, the 'Nik Nish' outlet occupying a prime corner of the third floor, has a great crowd pull of all ages due to its spectacularly wide range of accessories and home products. The shop with its versatile product ranges is an ideal stop for the teenagers who flock its various corners in quest for matching accessories and gift items. Another added attraction of the shop, is the affordability of these products. The main attraction which any mall in Kolkata presents to its customers is the multi-cuisine and specialty restaurants like Starstruck and Oh! Calcutta respectively. However it is the fifth floor where one finds the food court called 'Burp' which is a real crowd puller. Each shop here enlists a chart indicating the kind of food available there to suit one's gastronomic interests. The mall also keeps in mind the interest of the young mothers with their kids towing along with them for shopping. To ensure a hassle-free shopping for them, there are the 'Timbaktoo' and 'Cool Kidz' corners which engage the kids with various indoor and outdoor activities, holding their
interest for hours. The colourful train with its multi-coloured appeal takes the child into a world of fantasy. Movies theatres are the only part of the entertainment, information and cultural media that involve the mall in a mutually lucrative feedback loop. Hence, the presence of the multi-theatre ‘Inox’ is a major cause behind the increase in the mall’s footfall during the weekdays and especially in the weekends.

A survey of the mall was done at various times of the day, but the study of its architecture was only possible when the mall was devoid of people and movement. Hence the time best suited were the wee hours in the morning when it had just opened and the customers were yet to come. The mall’s space, its size and scale were studied. Though the Forum had a disadvantage in the sphere of space constriction, yet it felt comfortable, intelligible, not overwhelmingly large but big enough to be a bit mysterious to warrant walking around and exploring. The most imposing aspect of the architecture was the escalator, which holds a dominant place and an alluring charm inviting all to ride up with it to the space above. The dome-shaped ceiling encased the mall which followed the typical model of western architecture. The subdued lighting in the corridors enhanced the attraction of the shops which were well lit to lure the customers within its confines. In short, the presentation of the Forum mall represents a typical mall decor and that is the reason for its popularity among the consumers as a favourite destination. Apart from the décor, the mall also represents the successful union of a vast number of Indian and International brands under one roof, which also adds to its attraction.

The phenomenal growth of the middle class in India with the rising levels of disposable income has resulted in the increasing demand for newer forms of leisure activities. One such is the multiplex cinemas which are housed within the shopping malls. These complexes concentrate on the dynamics of the changed exhibition scenario. This resurgence of the viewers to the multiplexes indicates a changing perception of the people towards spending. Even the composition of the viewers in these complexes show a certain biasness towards a certain section of population who are within the age bracket of 18 to 35 years with a background of students and employees of the IT and BPO sectors. These multiplexes, which are often situated with the malls, act as major crowd puller throughout the week, which definitely increases during the weekends. Thus it can be easily said that the arrival of these new movie theatres within the mall complexes have been successful in creating new leisure infrastructure catering mainly for the middle and upper middle classes. This film viewing experience is enchanted by the tantalising opportunities of eating out and shopping, thus endorsing a state sponsored consumerist culture (Viswanath 2007).
4.4.2 City Centre Mall and its structural distinctiveness as a mall

The next mall under study is the City Centre which is located in Salt Lake, a greater extension of Kolkata. Located at the strategic juncture of two main roads, this mall architecture does not follow the typical enclosed model; rather is more in the vision of a "hybrid mall" as discussed earlier. What strikes one's attention is the openness in the architectural design of the mall which very efficiently mingles the closed and open spaces of the mall without being obvious to the onlookers. So when one walks through the various parts of the mall, one constantly passes from a closed to an open space without the feeling of discomfort. As the mall is more in the form of a high-street mall, it does not have any specific distinctive entrance. Rather the mall is accessible from all the sections as it also lacks a boundary wall. So the mall is open for the viewer's eyes even from the main roads. This openness in the mall architecture has also been efficiently used in luring the onlookers inside the magic world of consumerism. The main side of the mall facing the main road has a huge courtyard which centres a kund and several flight of stairs leading up to the various parts of the mall. The other entrance is from the opposite side of the mall which faces the parking space. It facilitates those consumers who are travelling in their own vehicle, to be able to walk into the mall without taking a detour. There are several aspects to City Centre; its inclusiveness for one. With no boundaries to separate it from the street, it is open to people of all income and age groups. The architecture of the complex embodies the spirit of Kolkata. The central kund and numerous nooks and corners are created to fuel the city's best known passion - adda. Added to that, the Kalighat paintings and the art wall complement the city's artistic heritage. There's a touch of the Raj in the restored horse drawn tramcar from where the visitors can collect city memorabilia.
City Centre encompasses a large area which is very well utilized. The mall is divided into blocks like A, B, C, D and E each of which are interlinked with one another without losing its continuum. The blocks look somewhat alike, which adds to some confusion and complexity in the architecture. Hence, it has often been seen that the consumers have lost their ways in locating a particular store. Even though there are maps placed at different corners of the mall, consumers seem to take the help of the security guards, who are positioned such so as to guide people for directions. The first thing that strikes one when one enters this mall is the existence of the ample space and the imposing structure of the mall. The openness of the mall is a welcome relief, at the same time the entire structure is covered under the dome-shaped ceiling. The mall is characterized also by various corridors each of which encases various shops displaying their items with maximum care. As the mall allows the infiltration of ample sunlight, the lighting of the mall along its corridors, is kept natural. The part of the mall which is enclosed has specific lighting as needed in an enclosed space. However all shops and pedestrian areas are protected from the natural elements by a covered pergola. The natural light in the
mall helps the place to become a kind of retreat, a cool nook away from the bustle of the city life. People sit here silently, in groups or singly, in the nooks and corners of the mall. The place around the kund is however, the centre of attraction, like a garden buzzing with the soft murmur of those seeking privacy or loud discussions of various age groups.

The mall has leased out or even sold its shops to various outlets, as a result of which one finds branded stores rubbing shoulders with their unbranded cousins; yet none of them stand apart as each are engaged in their various kinds of crowd pulling tactics. Apart from outlets of various branded wears, jewellery shops, coffee shops, departmental stores and a multiplex theatre it also has a store called ‘Akriti’ which showcases products made by the less privileged, supported and promoted by NGOs. The mall also has office places and a residential block for its employees. The table 4 below depicts the proportion of shops catering to various segments, based on the nature of products they sell. It shows that a major number of shops within the mall cater to selling items relating to fashion, followed by shops which have food joints, not to mention an important number of those which are leased out for the office and commercial purpose.

Table: 4: The nature of shops catering to various products.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of shops</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fashion</td>
<td>36.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Goods/ Electronics</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banqueting</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication Services</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office &amp; Commercial</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gifts &amp; Stationary</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>27.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: City Centre Mall office.
Apart from the attractive showrooms, what catches viewers' attention is that particular corner of the mall which has the outlet of 'Tea Junction'. It is by now, the most popular junction among the visitors of the mall. It is not the selling of the masala tea, which the shop specializes in, that attracts the crowd but the entire ambience of the stall, which presents and captures the spirit of Kolkata. For example, the sitting arrangements involve small stools made of bamboos which are comfortable, where people sit and are engrossed in long conversations over a cup of hot tea, with or without a samosa (a typical food item very popular among the masses). Another interesting feature of the stall is the wall which though the various cartoons sketched on it, depicts Kolkata’s spirit. It is not only eye catching, but also very humorous; hence a very interesting piece worth-looking.

Picture: 10
Tea Junction at City Centre Mall – an important place for hangouts

Source: Snap shot taken at the mall by researcher

105 Thus it can be pointed out that despite the onslaught of global consumerism, these shopping spaces have tried to inculcate the local culture so as to be more successful in reaching out and adapting into the lives of the consumers (Jameson 2003).
The cartooned wall at tea junction depicting Kolkata's spirit.

Source: Snap shot taken at the mall by researcher

It was quite interesting to study the changing character of the mall during different times of the day as well as in contrast between the weekdays and weekends. This was also evident in the increasing number of footfalls in the weekends compared to weekdays. On a Saturday or Friday night, the huge crowd in the court in front of the multiplex movie theatre ‘INOX’ at City Centre include those who are either waiting for the shows to begin, or have left the show and are heading towards a food joint or just hanging out with families/friends. The mall is full of life even at the wee hours of night due to some concert or programmes, which are staged within its open courtyard or the air-conditioned multi-purpose banquet hall. So events like exhibitions, product launches, private parties, marriages, musical performances are always on the card, which keeps the entertainment quotient alive within the mall.
4.4.3 The Gariahaat Mall – a study of its environment

The last mall under study is the The Gariahaat Mall, also called the G6, which is quite small in structure compared to the other two. However, reasons for including it under the study have already been discussed earlier. The mall, which encomprises of two towers, is attached in the middle by the glass-walled escalator which connects both the sections. Huge colourful banners confront the consumers who walk through the twin glass doors, which invite temptingly to open up a world of consumption, predominated by goods. A couple of flight of stairs leads to the main and the only entrance of the The Gariahaat Mall. A driveway opening to the right, leads to the underground parking space, for those commuting in their private vehicles.

Picture: 12 The side view of The Gariahaat Mall

Source: Snap shot taken at the mall by researcher

This mall is under a single dome-shaped architecture, which is enclosed on all sides and is centrally air-conditioned. So the environment within the mall is weather controlled without any reflection of the natural influence to add to the comforts of the consumers visiting the mall, ensuring a pleasant environment. The flight of stairs and
escalators lift the consumers to the succeeding floors above, thereby gliding them further into the world of goods and products. The corridors of the mall along with the shops are all well lit up emphasizing the products showcased. The lighting sets up the ambience and mood for shopping. It is also accompanied by soft music which is centrally controlled and played in a muted volume. Both music and light affects the consumer’s sensory organs and help in creating a dreamy atmosphere transferring the consumers into a world of fantasy which is dominated by goods. The shops, with the typical glass-planned windows, open up to the corridor, which is circular in nature with the escalator taking the central position. All the floors showcase either apparels or shops catering to gift items or accessories. The major portion of the mall space is taken by two predominating retail outlets Westside (apparels and home products) and C3 (which specializes in food products which include mostly packed items). The predominant products include the apparels followed by accessories. Inside the mall the cramped space of the mall to some extent, restricts the consumers’ interest. However, due to the limited access by the consumers, which is revealed in the footfall numbers, the space restriction is not felt in weekdays. The topmost floor that is the fifth floor is dedicated to the food court, which has a display of a wide range of food items. This floor is most popular as various groups visit the joints in between their breaks from the shopping. The food court also acts as a major incentive for people who visit the section, irrespective of engaging in shopping within the mall. The nature of music played in the food court, unlike that in the other parts of the mall, is louder and blaring in nature which sets up the mood for party and entertainment. This distinctive change in the nature of music definitely strikes a researcher’s ears. Music plays a major role in indicating the character of the place and the ones played at these food joints are usually the latest remix versions of popular songs or some jazzy number which are appreciated by the young crowd who dominate these places. Another major attraction, which the mall holds to the consumers, is the presence of the C3 product shop. It would not be wrong to call it a shopper’s paradise, as it includes an array of such multiple food items and products which is a feast to one’s eyes. The colourful packets offering different flavours and types of products are so mesmerizing that it is very hard to come out of the shop without a single purchase.
4.4.4 Comparing the three shopping malls

Kolkata has witnessed the opening of numerous malls, which were surprisingly never in competition with each other. The reason behind this is based on the philosophy that the increasing rise in malls leads to the development of a familiarity in the concept, thereby bringing in more people to these structures of consumption and bringing business for the mall owners. The idea of mall synergy – the attraction of number of shops and their variety, sum of the all parts drawing more customers than the mall’s part – displaced the fear of competition and became basic to shopping-mall philosophy. Hence, there exists a peaceful co-existence of these malls with a healthy competition to develop each one’s quality. Having studied each of these three malls, there comes in a certain degree of comparison among them. So this segment of the chapter would deal with the comparative analysis of the three malls in terms of their architecture, space and design, nature of shops and the philosophies behind the construction of these malls. The first point of comparison is that of the architectural feature of the three malls. Among these three, the Forum and the The Gariahaat Mall are those which are enclosed and have a centrally controlled environment within the mall. The City Centre on the other hand, is a hybrid mall which has a fusion of open and closed structures. As a result of its architectural design, the mall engages in showcasing a lot of entertainment events which are held in its open spaces - the courtyard or kund areas. Its specific architectural design allows a lot of space for people to hang around, which is not found in the other two malls.
Thus the reason behind the use of this architecture is based on the difference in the philosophical approach behind the construction of these malls. Even though the underlying philosophies for all of them is to induce the culture of consumerism, unlike the other two malls, the City Centre believes in translating a casual interest into purchase on impulse, through the leisure activity. So it tries to address the needs of those who know what they want and of those who do not. In doing so it promises to maximize the efficiency of the busy and enrich leisure of the idle. How much the mall is successful in translating this leisure of the idle into the act of consumption is a point of contention. The Forum or the The Gariahaat Mall on the other hand, is very specific in their demands, as a result of which care is taken within their architectural design to facilitate and motivate the consumers for shopping. So one hardly finds any space allocated for idle sitting. The sitting arrangements are limited and uncomfortable, which do not encourage timeless ‘adda’. The only space where one can spend limitless time is the food court, which is accessible only if one is ready to eat, which again means some form of consumption.

Having discussed the comparative study of the three malls on the basis of their designs and architectural form, the focus is now on the issue regarding the nature of
the malls. Though all these malls aimed at having the important brands as a part of their outlets, yet it is the Forum and the City Centre which score over the The Gariahaat Mall in terms of the important brand names involved. Also, unlike the other two, this mall had a major difference which was the lack of any movie theatre within its space. Though it was argued that this mall wanted to concentrate more on shopping as a prime activity, the other reason was that it lacked the space for a theatre as majority of the portion was taken up by the two leading stores (Westside and C3). So on an apparent level, there seemed a difference of visions as well as methods in attracting larger footfalls among these three malls. To conclude, it would not wrong to point out that whatever be the differences, none of these three malls in their design or in the ways of attracting the consumers, are involved in outdoing each other. Rather, each of these malls has a harmonic relation creating specific customers of its own. However, what these malls face may be the competition from the alternative form of market structures like the existence of the Gariahat market or the New Market. For example, this threat is more relevant for the The Gariahaat Mall, which is situated in such close proximity to one of the busiest and age-old shopping hub - the Gariahat market. The next chapter will try to focus on this issue in greater details.

4.5 Experiencing malls: An engagement with the respondents

In order to understand the social relationships and the experiences that the consumers undergo within the malls, a study of its environment was necessary to situate the relationships within this social milieu. Having done so, the focus of the study shifts on to understand the experiences that the consumers undergo while visiting these various malls. It is true that the reaction of the consumers about the experiences that they undergo varies among various age structures. This demanded a study of the reactions of the consumers, cutting across various age groups. Similarly, the gender aspect too played an important role in understanding the concept of how mall is looked at, as a space of consumption. Further classification was done on the basis of the employment status, nature of income of the respondents along with factors like number of earning members
in the family and the income range of the family, which helped in providing valuable information regarding the perception of the mall as a shopping space.

4.5.1 Experiencing shopping mall across various age groups

The first category dealt with, is that of ‘age’ as it is considered a major classification in the understanding of society’s perception to various phenomena. It is through the age distinction, that one can gauge the changes in the perceptions of society, if any. It has been established in the western societies that the nature of consumption pattern differs across the ages. For example, Martin and Turley (2004) focused their study on the attitude and the consumption motivation that the older segment of Generation Y consumers (9-25 years) have towards a mall. Again, we come across studies made by Wilhelm and Mottner (2005) on the teenage mall behaviour and preferences, where they show how they are the ready embracers of this particular shopping experience. So age became a major factor in categorizing the respondents, who visited the malls. While conducting the study on the malls in Kolkata, special care was taken to understand how various people from different age groups, perceived malls as the new site of consumption. So the following Chart 3.1 indicates the age composition of the respondents visiting the malls.

*Chart 3.1*

![Chart showing age distribution of respondents visiting malls]

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
It is interesting to note that the age composition of the malls underwent changes at various times of the day. As a researcher, this was a very remarkable phenomenon that was perceived while undertaking the study of the malls. City Centre, which is in Salt Lake, is conveniently located amidst the residential part of the city. As a result, during the early part of the day, (that is from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm) the mall is visited by a large number of people belonging to the age group of 65 years and above. These retired persons use the mall as the meeting place where they spend their idle leisure time within its confines, catching up with their friends or just watching the activities surrounding them. They are the residents of the nearby areas and, in majority cases, walk down to the mall. When asked about their choice of mall as a place of interaction as opposed to a park or any other public place, they commented on the environment factor which was clean, and on the comfortable sitting arrangement in the mall. This is applicable in case of City Centre because of the uniqueness of its structural construction, which facilitates sitting arrangements, thereby encouraging the culture of ‘adda’. Moreover the colourful surrounding of the mall had a certain youthful character of its own, which was enjoyed by them. Most importantly, they said that the mall provided them with multiple shops; so before returning they could buy the desired items required for the day. If nothing else, browsing through the new products also gave them ideas for buying things for their family members. Thus, for these retired individuals, mall came as a recluse which provided a respite from their every day life. Interestingly, all of these retired individuals were males. Another aspect was that, such kind of visit by the retired individuals was not very rampant in the other two malls i.e. the The Gariahaat Mall and The Forum Mall. There can be two reasons behind this factor: firstly, as said earlier, the construction of the City Centre itself encourages the culture of ‘adda’ as there are ample places to sit and interact without much disturbance. On the other hand, the enclosed space provided by the Forum or The Gariahaat Mall, is very limited and does not give much opportunity for being engaged in a leisurely session of interaction. The second reason is that the Salt Lake area consists of residences, where a large proportion of retired couple live alone as their children have shifted out of Kolkata in search of jobs or educational opportunities. Hence for them, the mall’s active atmosphere gives a respite from their monotony and solitude.

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The maximum number of respondents who seem to frequent the malls belong to the age group of 15-25 years. Respondents of this age group are the teenagers and college students, who frequent the malls, usually during the later part of the morning and afternoon. The proximity of these malls to the schools and colleges has also resulted in an increase in the visits by the students. Among the three malls, it is the The Gariahaat Mall which comparatively draws less of student population. The reason is because of the presence of the Gariahaat Market which caters to the student population providing goods at cheaper rates. However, both at Forum and at City Centre, the population of the Generation Y is very high in number. The Generation Y population includes those who are between teenage and marriage – also called the ‘younger generation’. This is the age group which is open to the window of unlimited consumption for and on the shelf, constrained only by financial circumstances. The consumption cycles of the youth are highly visible but also very erratic in nature. They are heavily influenced by the branded products and often spend a significant amount of money in impulsive purchases. Moreover, exposure to the global culture of consumerism has transformed them into icons of consumer lifestyle which is based on the western (read American) culture. Basically, they use the mall as a place to meet with old friends or as a place to hang out. They usually do not intend to visit the malls for the purpose of shopping but mainly for browsing. The mall generates a casual interest within them to the extent that they often go in for impulsive buying. So it is often seen that they go back purchasing a pair of earrings or some other items which caught their eyes and whose purchase was not anticipated. So they are not regular customers but have the potential to turn into one, at any point of time. Even if buying is not always in their top priority list, the one common thing which they go for is the ‘food court’. A survey at the food court in City Centre and at Forum between 12.00pm to 3.30pm shows the place to be filled with school and college goers. On

106 The Generation Y consumers as indicated in the study of Martin and Turley belonged to the age bracket of 19-25 years of age. According to them this group of the adult generation Y consumers have been often excluded from studies, but as they play a major role in the consumption structure (American Society) hence their consumption behaviour in the malls has been brought out in this study. The inclusion of this group is very important as the study reveal that this group of population is the consumers who have grown up in a world where malls existed as a part of their life and hence they are the ones who are ready to embrace the mall culture at a faster pace than the groups above them. This teenage crowd is thus the source of future target consumers. In this study however the range of the Generation Y consumers have been from the range of 15-25 years in order to include the group of school children who are seen flock the malls at the morning and afternoon hours.
approaching such a group at the City Centre 'food court' and asked about the reasons behind the choice of the particular venue, the following aspects came to the forefront:

The group interviewed consisted of five members, among them the oldest was 17 years (the respondent, girl), who was accompanied by her school friends (two girls, both of the same age), her younger brother (age: 10 years) and sister (age: 6 years). They were all at the City Centre as their exam results were out and hence, were celebrating by having a day out at the mall. Before they had come over for lunch the respondent’s brother and sister were engaged in playing at the kid’s corner which was in the same floor beside the food court while the respondent and her two friends went for a stroll in the other parts of the mall. They were not accompanied by any other senior member; hence the respondent was the sole guardian of her siblings. An excerpt of the interaction with the respondent follows:

Interviewer: Having a day out?
Respondent: Yes.
Interviewer: How often do you visit this mall?
Respondent: Four or five times a month, when the school is on, otherwise whenever we have holidays we drop in, may be twice or thrice a week.
Interviewer: Where do you stay?
Respondent: Salt Lake - FD block (which is a residential place and is also situated at a very close proximity to the mall)
Interviewer: How do you come to the mall?
Respondent: We live very close to this place so we usually walk down to the mall.
Interviewer: Whom do you usually accompany while visiting this mall?
Respondent: Actually it depends,... but mostly it’s my friends who come over with me, as both my parents are busy working.
Interviewer: So what are you celebrating? Birthday?
Respondent: Nope, actually the term results are out so we’re celebrating.
Interviewer: Where do you usually eat in the mall?
Respondent: At the food court usually.
Interviewer: Why? Don’t you like the other food joints or the restaurants?
Respondent: No, actually there is a lot of variety of fast foods that are available here...and moreover its real cool place to hangout you know. Restaurants are too stiff and formal we drop in sometimes when we are with our parents. Otherwise ‘food court’ is really a ‘chill out’ place...the music is also very good. On top of that the prices of the things are affordable as per our limited budget.
(The mode of payment in the food court was based on purchase of a food credit card of a minimum of Rs 100/ which can be swapped with purchase of any food from the existing counters. This mode of payment is prevalent in all the food courts at the three malls).

So the food court is one of the favorite joints of many teenagers as well as office goers at all the malls, especially at the City Centre and Forum, each of which is located at a very central place, close to the schools of the surrounding areas. The importance of this group lies in the fact that this generation becomes socialized into the culture of consumption, which later benefits the mall owners as a few years down the line, they become potential consumers. So, even though at present, they do not contribute in a major sense to the act of shopping, their presence is definitely encouraged by the shop owners.

The behavior of this group has a gendered distinction. Whenever a group of girls hang out in the mall, the trip to the casual-wear store is a part of their tour. Similarly at Forum, in a trendy store for women's wear CottonWorld Corp, a group of girls were seen to walk into the store. For a considerable time, they were seen browsing through the different segments and finally left without purchasing anything. When I asked the sales person, she said:

Sales person: “Girls of their age are a regular visitor to this place...most of the time they go through the stuff buying nothing. If any special item catches their attention, they are ready to buy it. However in majority of the cases, they come to see the latest trend.”

Interviewer: So when do you have the maximum sale?
Sales person: We usually give discount offers once a year during the time of January –February when there is maximum sale.

Interviewer: How much does the sale increase?
Sales person: It’s difficult to tell the exact figure, but it doubles up
Interviewer: To what particular percentage does the sale increase?
Sales person: The sale is almost up 50%, which is approximately over more than one lakh.

107 At City Centre the food court also caters to the crowd of office goers who come in for a quick bite from their offices, which surrounds the mall. A dearth of good restaurants at the Salt lake area has made the restaurants at City Centre a common venue by these regular office goers. As the mall provides with a lot of choices hence people prefer to eat here.
Interviewer: What about the puja time sale?
Sales person: Sale during the pre-pujas time is also high; otherwise there is a steady sale throughout the year.

Interviewer: Who are your target consumers?
Sales person: Though we have a wide range of products but as they are mainly the formal types hence our target consumers include mostly the office goers. But we also have a range of trendy-wear, catering to the teenage groups who drop in for their buy.

More discussions on the shop’s sale, the nature of cutomers and the mode of payment are dealt in the chapters that follow. The point is basically to note the buying behaviour of these teenage crowds (mostly girls). It was seen that even though they are frequent visitors to these shops, the rate of purchase is not very high. The reason behind this may be firstly, the high price range of the products and also, the nature of the products which are more of the formal kind. Comparatively, the inflow of teenage boys is very low in this outlet. They on the other hand, have a greater fascination for a music store or even a gadget showroom. Interaction with the owner of the Music World at The Gariahaat Mall and later on with some music and gadget showrooms at the other malls brought out the fact that students (mostly boys) frequent these shop in greater number and they are the ones who also go in for a maximum impulsive purchase. For example, while talking to a respondent (male, 17 years) at the Music World, it came out that the demand for video games is very high among these age groups:

Interviewer: Do you come to this Mall regularly?
Respondent: No, sometimes
Interviewer: What things interest you?
Respondent: I usually drop in to buy music CDs, and stuff like that....
Interviewer: Don’t you have a music shop near your place?
Respondent: Yeah I have, but sometimes they do not have the stock, which I want..

Interviewer: What kind of stock?
Respondent: Recent movies, or video games which are available here.
Interviewer: You like playing video games?
Respondent: Yes, but nowa-days I don’t find time to play constantly as my younger brother does...my board exams are approaching....

Interviewer: What else do you look for in the mall?
Respondent: Well there aren’t much choice in here....I would have wanted to look into the gadget showroom, but there is no good outlets here, so I prefer to do the browsing at the Gariahaat Market. It’s got good shops.... Sony World, Anandamela..etc
Interviewer: What about clothes? There are quite a few garment shops out here... don't you drop in there?
Respondent: Oh clothes bore me... I usually go in for the branded stuff.... but what is there to choose... you just need to pick the colour and the size. So I prefer to leave that to my mother.
Interviewer: So you actually come all the way for the music videos or for the games to this mall?
Respondent: Not really, I usually drop in with my friends and we come to chat and have food at the food court upstairs... it's a good place to pass our time... though we don't get much chance now-a-days.

Thus, from the above discussion it is again confirmed that for Generation Y consumers both the malls act as new places of hangouts, and at the same time as places to browse through products of their choice. Though there is also a marked difference in the nature of the shops that these consumers browse, the difference is gender-based rather than age.

In the afternoon, the malls are frequented by housewives who are seen in the act of browsing the outlets, resulting in purchase of commodities. Many of them visit the malls for the purchase of their daily household products. For example, at The Gariahaat Mall as well as at the City Centre, the presence of the C3 attracts a large number of housewives for purchasing their everyday products from these retail outlets. Apart from that, women love the act of shopping and often use the malls to meet with friends or pass their time browsing the shops. As in majority of the cases, they control the strings of the household budget, which gives them the power to make purchasing decisions for the entire family.

One of the major outlets in The Gariahaat Mall, C 3 – the Marketplace, was a part of my research study. This is a major retail store, keeping a varied range of products, ranging from everyday household products, consumer durables to food products\textsuperscript{108}. This outlet is placed at a very convenient position at the Lower Ground Floor, which makes it handy for the consumers. The outlet encompasses the entire ground

\textsuperscript{108} C3, which is a supermarket chain located at both the malls of Gariahaat and City Centre found it unviable to sell fresh vegetables, as they were not able to compete with the thriving local bazaars located at the near proximity to both the malls. So its outlets had to be downsized leading to the maintenance of specialized packed and tinned products and other consumer durable items as specified. This indicates that malls cannot fulfill all requirements of the local bazaars and hence adapts accordingly to the situation. So there seems an existence of a harmonious relation at both the ends.
floor and is easy accessible through its main opening, which is towards the entrance. So any one who has come only for the purchase of everyday grocery/food products, will not have to go to any other part of the mall, but walk directly into this store and get the shopping done at one go. The way the shop is compartmentalized is worth studying. Each product is kept in neatly-stacked racks, which display the same products made by different brands. For examples, one finds the stack of shampoo of various brands – all at one place. This makes the customers aware of the multiple brands of the same product, making it easy for the buyer to choose from a greater variety.

In recent times, there is an increase in the demand of such kind of outlets where one finds the range of all household products under a single roof. So in the words of the director, C3, Mr Rohan Ghosh interviewed in The Telegraph, dated 5th June, 2005: “Supermarkets are the future. They are the way of tomorrow. The only question is how fast we get there?” Interestingly, when asked about the customer types who frequent the shops, the owner explained that housewives have been very positive in shopping at such retail outlets. As in India and in Kolkata too, the everyday regular decisions regarding the buying of home goods, is still taken by the housewives; hence a major proportion of the customers comprise them. Also, they are likely to visit mostly during the daytime or during the afternoon. Apart from housewives, the next most-frequent visitors include men belonging to the age group of 30 years, working professionals who go for shopping in the later part of the evening, preferably after their office hours. During the weekends, the nature of the consumers frequenting the shops changes. Then it comprises mostly families who come for a visit to the mall and go for a monthly shopping for their household goods all at one time. Among these three categories, it is definitely the housewives, who spend maximum time shopping, as they take special care to choose their products.

The shop outlet on its own does not go for any discount sale unless it is given by any specific product. When asked about the nature of sale, the owner explained that the trend in shopping in such outlets is increasing day by day. He explained that not only do people get access to a large number of products at one go, but it is also hassle-free and guarantees the price and quality of the product. Thus more and more consumers
are adopting this kind of shopping. This trend has been revealed in the nature of sale, in the C3 which is over 1.7 lakhs per day on weekdays increasing to a sale of 2.5 lakhs per day in the weekends. This immense sale figure is also an indicator of the changing trends in the household shopping among the Kolkata buyers. Similarly C3 outlet at the City Centre Mall is also doing a better business than its other outlet at the Lee Road. The City Centre outlet is having a larger customer base which is indicated in increasing footfalls. Another positive factor behind the outlet’s success is its development of permanent customers who come back quite often to shop in this outlet. This retention of customers shows a very positive aspect in the shop’s success over the other outlets.

When a housewife (35 years) was approached for her views on shopping in such a retail outlet, her reaction was: “I prefer everything to be of standardized nature like daal in sealed plastic packets and not in paper bags”. Similar was the view of another respondent (Female, 37 years), who has shifted from the para (local) shops in favour of these new supermarkets, and since then has been a regular visitor. While picking up her choice of packed products like daal and rice she comments: “See these are clean, sealed in packets with proper weights and dates printed on them....so you needn’t worry about their quality. Why do you want to run the risk of finding the mouldy, worm-infested stuff when these are easily available?”. Another housewife’s (45 years) views on these new retails joints was: “I find compact, all-under-one-roof destinations most comfortable.....Women like checking out a lot of things before choosing. Here, they don’t have to ask.”. So for them as long as the prices stay within the reach of the middle class, supermarkets will win in the long run.

These makes one probe deeper into the understanding of the changing sentiments of people. So, on one hand you have the colourful collage of a traditional marketplace, which though smelly and messy with leaves and fruits strewn all over, has a character of its own. In contrast, there are the outlets at the various malls that are the epitome of cleanliness, sanitized sameness and standardized products. With people’s access to such outlets, the traditional market places are coming under rigorous attack from the point of survival, as many are losing their regular customers to these big retail outlets.
Coming back to the issue regarding the age composition of the respondents who frequent the mall, the next category, which is predominant, is the age group belonging to the bracket of 25-35 years. A majority of the respondents frequenting the malls, mostly during the weekends, fell under this group followed by the age group of 35 years and above, which consisted of families or couples. This segment was my target consumers as it is these people who have the purchasing power in their hands and are also the ones who set the trend of consumption. A study of their purchase behaviour would show us the general trend of the consumerist culture prevalent in Kolkata. One thing that can be concluded is that the concept of mall has penetrated the various age groups of people in general. Each age group has embraced a visit to these malls in its own way. The major aspect that comes out of this is the acceptance of the mall’s existence within the lives of the people and by interacting with them it was evident that this new experience of shopping was here to stay.

Studies on the nature of shopping as an activity revealed that it was predominantly seen as a woman centric activity. Several studies made by the theorists also pointed out shopping malls as part of feminization of public space. Marketers also estimated that women not only did 80-90 per cent of the shopping, but also spent a great deal time of at it. The shift of the place of consumption from the public marketplaces to the private spaces like the shopping malls, witnessed further involvement of women shoppers. These shopping centres were planned, keeping in mind the female consumers. In contrast to the hustle and bustle of high street markets, malls provide a secured and comfortable environment for shopping. They fill up the gap between the contentment of home and the vastness of public space. So for women, the mediation of public and private space provided by mall is a welcome relief. Today malls are one of the most secure

109 Cohen (1996), in her work referred to the predominance of women in the act of shopping specially with the rise of the malls. She also talked of how from 1950s onwards in the post World War II these female consumers had the access to greater purchasing power with the possession of credit cards that increased the disposable income in the society. However she was also quick to point out how the use of the credit cards not necessarily led to the women’s independence rather had an opposite effect. It led to more dependence on her husband or father who finally qualified the bills. Similarly Friedberg (1991) also talked about how women who were empowered with purchasing power became the target of consumer address. They acquired new lifestyles and choices which was the result of the creation of desire by the advertisements and the new consumer culture. These desires elaborated in a system of selling and consumption which was a result of the relation between looking and buying.
places for shopping, as their security lies in the hands of the mall authorities. Malls were constructed with a view to provide maximum facilities to the women shoppers. Hence, to conduct a hassle-free shopping, the authorities came up with playgrounds for children, where mothers could leave them and enjoy browsing shops or pick up their desired items. As females are the major decision-makers in the households, hence, the malls tried to empower them, as they orchestrate their family's leisure. Even though females love the act of shopping, they prefer their family members to accompany them in spending time at these centres. So visits to the malls have become a family affair, where their husbands and children accompany the ladies. This was also deduced from the interviews of the housewives who visited the malls. Further excerpt from the interview done on the housewife (35 years) at the C3 in The Gariahaat Mall is given below.

*Interviewer:* Do you shop alone?
*Respondent:* Depends actually...I usually drop in alone to buy the household grocery from here, otherwise my husband and kids accompany me during the weekends.

*Interviewer:* Are you a regular visitor to this mall?
*Respondent:* I come in regularly for my grocery but otherwise as family outing.... its not very regular....may be twice a month....not more than that.

*Interviewer:* So you prefer to shop at the weekends or weekdays?
*Respondent:* I prefer weekends as then it becomes a family affair...and we spend a lot of time here, but now-a-days it's getting very crowded in weekends....so I have shifted my buying of daily stuff to the weekdays when there isn't so much of a crowd.

*Interviewer:* So what do you do in this mall during the weekends?
*Respondent:* As there are no movie halls, we have our lunch out here and then stroll through the shops...pick up any item which I missed out otherwise or which just happens to catch our attention.

*Interviewer:* Do you prefer The Gariahaat Mall to other malls that are coming up?
*Respondent:* Not really, actually it's located very near to our place, so we usually go to the The Gariahaat Mall – but there is as such no preferences...if some others come up in near future...then we might drop in there too....after all they are all the same.

While continuing the discussion on the issue of looking at the malls as a space for freedom for the women shoppers, the question that is raised is whether shopping at the malls for a female is in reality a liberating experience? A mixed reaction exists among the scholars on this issue. The reason is that it has been viewed by critics
like Rachel Bowlby, who say that malls help in further falling into the vicious cycle of consumption which is nothing but another level of enslavement to material culture. So he says that: "the shop that perpetually incites its customers to want ever more things can be seen as a form of psychological imprisonment: the irresistible object exerts a force as much as it elicits a longing" (Moss 1962 reprinted 2007; pp: 32). Also on another front, shopping at the malls restricts a woman’s sphere of freedom, as she gets habituated to being comfortable in a protected space. So instead of liberating, it further restricts her travelling space. It was further observed that a large number of them were dependent on private vehicle while commuting to these places which further restricts her activities. When one of the respondents (female, 26 years) was questioned on this issue, her comments were as follows:

**Interviewer:** Are you a frequent visitor to this mall?
**Respondent:** Yes, I happen to come to City Centre quite often.
**Interviewer:** What other malls do you visit?
**Respondent:** I have been to Forum too...
**Interviewer:** Where do you live?
**Respondent:** I live in the Southern part of Kolkata, near Lake Market
**Interviewer:** How often do you happen to visit Forum or the City Centre?

*Once a month or more than that...can you specify?*
**Respondent:** I usually visit City Centre three or four times a month and Forum may be once or twice a month....

**Interviewer:** Isn’t City Centre farther than Forum from your area?
**Respondent:** Yes but I happen to work in Salt Lake and then it’s quite near to my workplace...

**Interviewer:** So how do you commute to these malls?
**Respondent:** For, Forum I depend on my own vehicle, while for the other at Salt Lake, I either walk down or take my car if it’s after office hours. Moreover as there aren’t much options of public transport in Salt Lake, I tend to depend on my own means of communication or that of my friends.

**Interviewer:** What if you did not have access to your vehicle? Would you have availed of the public transport?
**Respondent:** May be not, cause the Salt lake area is very secluded especially after it’s dark and I wouldn’t want to risk myself...Forum though, is more centrally located... yet if I did not have access to my car, I would have to restrict my choices some markets near my place.

Thus from the interaction of the above respondent, it is evident that the dependence on the private transport is quite high while visiting the malls. The chart
below, which gives a picture on the mode of transport availed by the respondents visiting the malls, further emphasizes this aspect. The data in the Pie Chart 3.2 indicates that a large majority of the respondents are dependent on the private transport for commuting to these malls. This is because these malls are quite far off from residential areas and hence it becomes easily accessible only if one has one's own vehicle. Especially in case of City Centre, which is located at Salt Lake a greater extension of Kolkata, it becomes difficult to be reached due to lack of public transport at night. Especially for a woman, the availability of her vehicle gives her a control over her movements and a choice of whether or not to visit the malls. In some sense, this restricts the access for those who do not have their own vehicles in commuting to these malls, who have to otherwise depend on someone to visit these places.

**Pie Chart 3.2**

![Pie Chart 3.2](image)

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

Having talked about the debatable issue of whether mall in reality, restraints or leads to women emancipation and the nature of preferred mode of communications used by the respondent, the study tries to refocus on the issue which was being dealt with earlier. The issue is the age-sex composition of the consumers visiting the malls at Kolkata. While studying the nature of shoppers in the malls in Kolkata, a very similar aspect, which was prevalent in the western context, was noticed. This is the changing composition of the crowd at various times of the day as well as with respect to weekends and weekdays. The composition of the crowd during the weekend therefore,
changes drastically when there is the predominance of families visiting malls. Shopping centres also respond to these trends with open arms, as it results in an increase in the sale. This is also because shopping at the malls is a multifarious affair, which usually encompasses window shopping, leisure strolls followed by eating out or watching movies. This will be taken up in the following chapters.

4.5.2 Experiencing mall from a gendered perspective

The female shopper or the female consumer is always considered a key attribute in the reorientation of shopping. During the colonial times, shopping was considered a male-centric activity as women were not allowed to venture into such public places. However, with changing times as shopping became more modern, it has been acceptable for women to venture into these places of consumption. Despite the changing times, women unaccompanied in the open market places often have to face a lot of trouble. From the haggling with hawkers on one hand for a fair deal to keeping an eye for any troubleshooter is indeed a tiresome activity. However, the development of the departmental stores and later on the opening of shopping malls at various parts of the city facilitated these women to engage in a hassle-free shopping activity devoid of tensions and uneasiness. The mall environment with its pre-existing security system provides an assurance to woman’s security within its complex. Moreover, as the products are mostly sold for fixed prices it removes the tensions related to haggling with the seller making the process smooth and enjoyable. Also, the added facilities which the mall provide right from its air conditioning system to elevators, helps in further facilitating the shopping to be perceived as an entertainment activity. So a visit to these malls in Kolkata shows quite a number of female shoppers in groups or individually engaged in the act of shopping. The idea of visiting a shopping mall has gained so in popularity that it is often a favourite destination for women across all ages to meet their friends and pass the day within its confines. This echoes in the words of a respondent who is a housewife (37 years) when she talks about her views on shopping at a mall vis-à-vis a marketplace:
Interviewer: How do you find the atmosphere in the mall?
Respondent: Quite nice, in fact I like it better than the open market places....

Interviewer: Why is it so?
Respondent: Actually the marketplaces like the New Market or even Gariahaat is not much safe after dark, so it becomes difficult for me to shop in those places...also these malls stay open quite late at night when my husband can pick me up while returning from his workplace...

Interviewer: Do you go shopping alone? Or with friends?
Respondent: It depends...actually...if I am in a hurry I just drop in to collect some stuff. Other times we meet up with friends occasionally...

Interviewer: So mostly you shop alone?
Respondent: Yes, but then the shops provide with so many things and varieties of products that time just passes by...it's quite interesting...

Interviewer: Don't you feel confused in choosing products? There are so many varieties?
Respondent: That's the best part...either it's that you know what you want..or you browse and get to know about so many other options...I quite like the experience...

Interviewer: Do you take help of the staff in choosing your products?
Respondent: Well I do listen to their options but finally take my own decisions as each one has their preferences. But yes some of them are helpful in guiding you.

Interviewer: Is there any other reason for preferring malls over marketplaces?
Respondent: Its safer as I said earlier, also that in malls you go in with a mindset that there is no chance of haggling with price...so I feel quite relieved...

Interviewer: Why? Don't you feel that you are being over priced?
Respondent: Yes I do sometimes feel that some of them are overpriced...but I also console myself that at least I did not have to encounter that hassling experience of bargaining...which I find quite taxing in nature...moreover at malls I get quality products for which I am ready to pay...

Such views are not unique, as increasing women seem to prefer shopping in malls in comparison to marketplaces.

The Pie Chart 3.3 given below indicates the gender composition of the respondents, who were interviewed in the malls. Interestingly, while there was certain reluctance on the part of the female shoppers when they were interviewed, the male shoppers, in contrast, were ready to give more information. As a result, the gender composition of the mall respondents showed a majority of them to be male respondents. However, this does not negate the existence of the female shoppers within the malls, the
trend that was noticed was that apart from college or school groups, in most cases, the female shoppers were accompanied by husbands or family members.

**Pie Chart 3.3**

![Pie Chart 3.3: Sex of the respondents visiting the malls]

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

Though a balance was required in having an equal representation from both sexes, the final sample had a somewhat skewed result. Continuing further with the discussion regarding the nature of people who frequent the mall, it was seen that the housewives frequented the malls, preferably in the early hours of the day. The latter part of the day, that is, in the evening and at night, the mall was frequented by couples (both married and unmarried) and families. The mall’s event manager and engineers specifically designed programmes to appeal to the families, encouraging them further to spend leisure time at the mall. Apart from the multiplex theatres and the food joints that provide entertainments, these malls, in order to attract the crowds, conduct various programmes within its premises, which attract a huge crowd. At the premise of City Centre for example, several programmes are held at various times of the year which pulls a huge crowd for example on Valentine’s Day 2007, a huge celebration was held at City Centre for the couples\(^\text{110}\). As the composition of the mall-goers is so varied, it requires further classifications on the basis of income and nature of employment. However, before getting into the intricacies of the economic aspect, another major classification is based on the marital status. Out of a total respondent of 115, majority of the respondents were not married. However in this case, there is more or less a balance between the two categories.

\(^{110}\) Refer to the article on Crazy Kiya re....in *The Telegraph*, February 16, 2007.
The chart 3.4 indicates the marital status of the respondents. Among the non-married category, majority of the respondents were college students, reflected in the above data.

4.5.3 Economic criterion of the respondents visiting the malls

It is true that in recent times, Kolkata has witnessed a remarkable growth in the service-sector industry. Apart from that, there is a boom in the Business Process Outsourcing sector, which has provided lots of job opportunities for fresh graduates. Hence, certain sectors of the population have witnessed rapid economic growth. Apart from that there has also resulted in an increase in the proportion of families under the double-income group where both the husband and wife are earning members. This has also resulted in an increase in the cash flow within society at large. All these factors led to increasing purchasing power of these sections. The next Pie Chart 3.5.1 indicates the percentage of the married respondents belonging to the double income group, who frequented the malls.
In order to understand the rise in consumerism, the need was felt to understand the purchasing power of these respondents. Majority of the respondents belonged to the age bracket of 15-25 years, whose purchasing power was not very high. Being mostly dependent upon the monthly stipend/ pocket money given by the parents this young group had a limited purchasing power. However, among them some were engaged in part-time jobs at the Business Process Outsourcing centres, which gave them access to a considerable amount of liquid money. As these jobs mainly provide them with pocket money, they did not have to take the financial burden of the familial concerns that led them to spend freely on their individual selves. The Pie Chart 3.5.2 indicates the working status of the respondents.

*Pie Chart 3.5.2*

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

Among the working population, majority of the respondents were from the professional field. The following charts indicate the nature of background of their employment (Pie Chart 3.5.3), the range of income of these respondents (Pie Chart 3.5.4), their range (Pie Chart 3.5.4), and annual family income (Pie Chart 3.5.5), and consequently, the number of earning members (Pie Chart 3.5.6) in the family. All these indicate that the respondents have a considerable disposable income in their hands, which support them to indulge in consumption activities.
Majority of the respondents belong to the engineering and technical professions followed by those who are into private organisations. The income range of the respondents also shows a varied range (Chart 3.5.4). The majority of them fall under the income range of Rs 2-4 lakhs/annum. Those who are below the income range of rupees one lakh, include the students who depend on stipend or pocket money from the guardians. Otherwise, there is somewhat equal distribution of respondents from the categories of higher income range which is above Rs 4 lakhs/annum.

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
In maximum cases, it has been observed that the annual income of the respondent’s family fall in the range of 4 lakhs and above (Pie Chart 3.5.5). This indicates that the respondent’s family income is comparatively high, which is the target consumer group of this study. This data is further supported by the data (Pie Chart 3.5.6) which reflects the number of earning members in the respondent’s family. It shows that in majority cases, the number of working members of the respondent’s family is more than two and above.

Pie Chart 3.5.6

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
All these factors indicate a favourable environment, which supports the rise in the culture of consumption. However, the question that arises is whether these factors are sufficient indicators or if there are any other aspects, which influence the culture of consumption. What is the actual scenario and how do the people of Kolkata look at this new culture? What is the reality that lies behind these data? An endeavour to arrive at definite answers, based on the personal views that the respondents and the shop owners have regarding the concept of shopping as an activity, will be discussed in the next chapter.