Chapter Five: Sociology of Shopping

Not only is shopping melting into everything, but everything is melting into shopping. Through successive waves of expansion — each more extensive and pervasive than the previous — shopping has methodically encroached on a widening spectrum of territories so that it is now, the defining activity of public life. Why has it become such a basic aspect of our experience?

— Sze Tsung Leong

5.1 Shopping as a way of life

The codification of entertainment and leisure activity was first started from the time of the Renaissance. Ability to think above the fundamentals of life and to move beyond mere subsistence came with the economy gaining more stability. Since the middle of the nineteenth century, the act of shopping has witnessed a gradual transformation, evolving from the simple act of purchasing of goods and services to becoming an act of recreation and entertainment. One of the reasons accorded to the growing importance of shopping in modern times is the pervasiveness of the shopping ethos along with the entertainment that is achieved, while one is engaged in the act. Even though shopping had always carried entertaining elements with it, it was however from the post-modern era that it gained emphasis as a full-fledged entertaining character. The significance of shopping has become so pervasive that the term "buyosphere" was coined to indicate this realm. What took place was a change in the conditions related to shopping, where consumption was unleashed from its traditional parameters. It was no longer seen as a necessary activity, rather considered a ‘free activity’ with the individuals engaged in the act, not out of necessity, but for the sake of enjoyment. Another aspect, which needs to be highlighted, is that shopping, even in its nascent form, was considered a social activity. This occurred with the increasing availability of consumer goods at the new developed outlets which encased products of various ranges. Thus it became predominantly a public sphere activity. So, changes have been perceived from its

111 The term was coined by Thomas Hine (2002) in his work “I Want That! How We All Became Shoppers” (cited in Moss 1962 reprinted 2007) where he explained "buyosphere" as a ‘state of mind’ which comprises all the manifestations of shopping encompassing and also transcending both the ‘physical and virtual places’. So it involves all aspects connected from websites to fashion magazines, which help in the act.
manifestations in the arcades to the departmental stores, leading to the present day mammoth structures of shopping malls. These changes, in the architectural designs of the shopping places, themselves cry out the changing trends and perceptions of people towards regarding shopping as a leisure and pleasure-related activity. Kolkata too, a city with a colonial past, and traditional mind-set, witnessed a changing perception towards the nature of shopping. Though shopping’s entertainment quality was prevalent in the colonial past, the difference was that it was restricted to the minority section of the population. This section included those who belonged to the upper echelons and were often being exposed to the British way of life. Shopping for this section was more in terms of showcasing their status and power in the society. The construction of the Hogg Market, now renamed as the New Market, itself is an example of the prevalence of the culture of consumption among the colonial Indians. The initial predominance of the British gave way to free entry for all. Yet the fact remained that it was still an activity which was preserved for the elite. However it is this mindset, which took a gradual turn whereby the middle-class echelons were given the opportunity and the choice to buy what was once the preserve of the elites. Since the colonial rule to the present day, the city has witnessed a remarkable change in this perception, incorporating more and more people within its grasp of consumerism. This was revealed in the rise of the shopping malls which are coming up as new places of consumption and in some way or the other affecting the traditional marketplaces. So in the context of the rise of these structures of consumption, the study called for a look into these traditional marketplaces, so as to find out the way the malls affected these people. This also brings into focus, another major aspect, which is the understanding of the reactions of the people of Kolkata towards these new structures of consumption. This calls for a study of the malls vis-à-vis the traditional marketplaces that have, since decades, captured the hearts of the Kolkatans. Some of these marketplaces, which were studied, have a long association with the city even going back to the British era. So they have always played a very central role in the lives of the people of Kolkata. Keeping this in mind, the two market places chosen for the study were the Gariahat Market and the New Market, each of which have been a part of the history of Kolkata since its days of inception. The choice of these market places has thus been deliberate because of their historical existence which is also the reason for their being the
most popular among the masses. Before embarking upon a study of these marketplaces, it calls for an understanding of the concept of a marketplace.

5.2 Mall versus High-Street Shopping

The growth of mass consumption society witnessed changes not only in the sphere of consumption practices but also in the meaning of the marketplace. During its origin, marketplace not only provided a common ground for interactions between the buyers and sellers but also acted as the place for public interaction and resting place for the weary travellers. However the main focus was undoubtedly on economic exchange of goods and services. Since the days of its inception, the meaning and character of marketplace has undergone changes. So from a place of buying and selling of goods and services, it is seen as a place where dreams are transformed into needs, and consumption has become the main purpose for existence. It became the guiding principle in the market relation, which extended beyond purchases of goods and services. Consumption thus entered into the realm of leisure, culture and experiences and sensation using all kinds of persuasive tools for stimulating people to consume. A change in the meaning and concept of marketplace is also reflected in the transformation of the architectural form of the markets. The changes in the retail structure were developed for supporting these new methods of stimulations, which were reflected in new architectural forms of marketplaces like the shopping malls. With the penetration of the culture of consumerism into every nook and corner of the world, Kolkata too came under its influence. This is evident from the rapid breakdown of the age-old market structures, which are being replaced with new structures of consumption like the shopping malls and other retail outlets. Even though the city at this stage is witnessing such major changes, the question that comes up is how the people are perceiving and adapting to these newfound changes. The study thus tries to capture the voices of resentment or approval that comes up from the city lovers, who express their opinions on the structural changes that the city is undergoing in the current era. However before capturing their views, a study of the select marketplaces, which were chosen as part of the study, is called for. The two marketplaces that were selected for the
study were: Gariahat Market and the New Market. The details of these market places are given below.

Map 3: Location of the Marketplaces

If one is familiar with the city and the culture of Kolkata, it will not be difficult to point out that Gariahat Market and the New Market are the two busiest and the largest market places capturing the heart of the city. These market places are considered the heart of the city life, being flocked by consumers and onlookers throughout the day. This justifies their being a part of this study. Both of these marketplaces have occupied a special position in terms of the products, location and the unique character that each one
possessed. The market stretches from the main four point crossing to extend on either side of the two busy roads – Rash Behari Avenue and Gariahaat Road Crossing. Its position at the strategic points, thereby makes it easily accessible to people. It is thus one of the main markets being located in the Southern part of the city and is definitely a place of shopper’s paradise. The popularity of this marketplace is not just based on its strategic position; rather this marketplace is in direct competition to the The Gariahaat Mall, which is situated very close to this market. Shop outlets ranging from textiles, readymade garments, electronic gadgets, and almost every other thing can be found in this market. Besides the regular shops, there are the makeshift shops that crowd the sidewalks. These hawkers, who use direct method of selling on the buyers, have their temporary outlets by the side of the roads. These make-shift shops which were built on the pavements created obstacles to the free movement of the passersby. As a result, of this they were demolished by the government and this took place under the drive for the eviction of the hawkers during the 1990’s through the project of Operation Sunshine. As a result even though the streets gained more space for the pedestrians, it somehow changed the nature of the market. So a place, which was once, infested with the bustle of interactions among the buyers and sellers, each negotiating over a fair price, the hawkers calling out attractive options in order to lure the customers to their stalls from their neighbour’s, now present a more sober picture with the demolition of these make-shift stalls stealing away much of the spirit. Though these stall owners who were displaced were accommodated within the permanent stalls made in a separate area within the market, the market in the process has lost its old unique intrinsic character.

This leads one to the second marketplace, which is the New Market. It is considered to be one of the oldest and major markets in Kolkata. Being established during the time of the British Raj, this market was initially known as the Hogg Market or Sir Stuart Hogg Market. Later this market was renamed as New Market when a large portion of the Hogg market was razed by fire and in place a new extension came up. The

Hawkers have been the target victim of the various projects of beautification of cities. They are victimized as a part of the process whereby they are seen as an obstacle to the vision of globalisation. They are regarded as unsanitary thus creating a view which seems out of place to a larger vision of the new market aesthetics that is created by the new shopping malls and other retail outlets. So the drive to eradicate them has been taken up by the government in cities like Kolkata and Mumbai. For further read refer to Jackson 1999; Rajagopal 2001b; Kalhan 2007; Bunsha 2007).
central location of the market and the availability of a wide range of products has always resulted in it being the people's choice over the others, and hence a part of the study. The main entrance of the market, which faces Lindsey Street, depicts the British architectural design. The entire market is covered under a single dome brick structure, where the main space within the market is connected by five corridors which radiate from this central space. Interestingly, earlier this space had a small cannon, which was placed at its centre reminding of the British times. The corridors, each of which opens up to five directions, also act as entrances to the market and connect to this central space. It is true that this market constructed by the British, was the first of its kind of commercial architecture, which one now finds in the mall architecture. So it would not be wrong to say that Kolkata was exposed to these kinds of commercial architecture quite early, since the colonial rule. In this respect, the development of the shopping malls in Kolkata is not a very new concept, yet there are certain differences in the nature of consumption. The difference is located in the buyer’s nature and the philosophy behind the consumption, which has changed in recent times. The study will try to understand these social changes occurring in the consumption pattern.

5.2.1 Livelihood of the hawkers under threat from the shopping malls

In a levelling city like Kolkata, in the past one could not judge a buyer's means from his appearance or that of the shop. This was because in old Kolkata, the common man did not ‘shop’; he bought what he required. The opening of College Street Market in 1917 and consecutively, the New Market gave the middle class Kolkatans the first taste of consumerist shopping. Since then, Kolkata has travelled a long way in the nature of shopping. Old consumerism has been subsumed by the new over the years. So in recent times, consumerism has spread its specific historically-conditioned image in this part of the world. A striking change has taken place in the retail trade. Earlier, the shops catered to necessities and, at the most, a few unassuming necessary luxuries. By the mid 1960s there seemed to be a rise in the shopkeepers, who started their business by constructing ‘temporary’ shacks along the pavement of the main streets. These shops sold out less expensive commodities and saved greatly on overhead and labour costs. So, there
resulted in the constitution of a new group of consumers of less highly priced articles. Sometimes, the goods sold in these stalls, known as ‘hawkers corner’, were not of inferior quality but cheaper; simply because of more direct system of marketing, dispensing with intermediaries. An important feature of these marketplaces was the immediate relationship that existed between the producers and consumers. What was unique was that both the parties involved in the process were tied in a relationship where both applied knowledge and skill to judge quality and negotiate price. As there existed tough competition from fellow hawkers, each excelled in the act of presentation and interpersonal skill to sell his products. These hawkers also gained extensive knowledge of their customers which helped them to carve a niche among them. So the extent of commitment and initiatives taken by the hawkers is unparalleled and can never be found in the larger retail stores. However, with the eviction of the hawker’s corner, there was temporary dishevelment in the market structure. Since then, there have been some radical changes in the shopping scenario in Kolkata. The major changes that can be witnessed are the demolition of the old market places like the Lake Market, Bagbazar Market, College Street Market and many others with the consequent opening of several shopping malls in Kolkata. At this point it is important to point out that the two marketplaces, which have been taken under the study, have not yet been subjected to any demolition plan in recent times. A constant theme in the study of the contemporary retail space is a nostalgia or what is called agoraphilia. In the idealized traditional marketplace there is an immediate relationship between producers and consumers and both apply knowledge and skill to judge quality and negotiate price (Goss, 1993) been subjected to any demolition plan as in recent times. The privatization of public places in the creation of the shopping centres, has resulted in the ‘domestication’ of the streets, making shopping hassle free for the majority of the middle class consumers. All these are done at the cost of social and spatial exclusion for a particular section of population, who will not be able to visit the malls. There is also a threat to the livelihood of those numerous hawkers who flocked various streets of Kolkata in search of consumers. What is being lost is the traditional characteristic of the city as these markets were not just places for

113 A constant theme in the study of the contemporary retail space is nostalgia or what is called agoraphilia. In the idealized traditional marketplace there is an immediate relationship between producers and consumers and both apply knowledge and skill to judge quality and negotiate price (Goss, 1993).
purchasing products, but also the life of the city. Also in the process, the city is losing its unique characteristic features lent by each market. So in the words of a retired government employee (Male, 68 years) residing in South Kolkata, one finds a certain feeling of melancholy and remorse towards the demolition of this old marketplace and a resistance towards the new developments in the retailing business. He says:

Interviewer: What is your opinion about the changes taking place?
Respondent: You see, each of these old markets has a uniqueness of its own which is very difficult to be replaced by the new retail outlets...so I am happy with the markets here.

Interviewer: Are you aware of the news on demolitions of the old markets?
Respondent: Yes
Interviewer: What do you feel on this aspect?
Respondent: These old markets have an atmosphere of their own which is very unique in nature.... They have been a part of our existence for so long that they have become a part of our everyday life.

Interviewer: Why do you say it's unique?
Respondent: It's because these markets are not just the places for shopping.... as there is a certain human aspect related to them.

Interviewer: Meaning?
Respondent: These are not just places of consumption; rather a human relationship develops between buyers and sellers. Some of these relations even go back in generations.... some of these sellers are those whom I have know since my childhood days – where do you find this kind of relation in a hypermarket or a mall? I feel these new markets are impersonal.... efficient may be...but impersonal in nature. You hardly know the shop owners....nor the sales person that each stores have.....also if you happen to visit the stores some other time you are met with some new sales boy or girl.....when can the personal relation develop in this situation?

Interviewer: If we leave apart these personal relations...what about the shop environment?
Respondent: You see, the environment is created by the interrelations between the buyer and seller....so in that sense these malls certainly lack the personal touch that you face in these old marketplaces. Some of these shop-owners know their client's specifications to such details that is only possible because they go beyond selling goods.

Interviewer: Don't you agree that compared to these marketplaces, the retail shops are more hygienic or better maintained?
Respondent: Hygienic may be but bazaars are always colourful — not necessarily arranged as you find in these malls where everything will be neatly arranged in glass cases.....
Interviewer: What about the variety of products that these malls display?
Respondent: There may be a large variety of products displayed in these malls but many a times they do not sell products, which we require, or more so sell those, which we have never heard of.

Interviewer: So what is your preferred place for shopping?
Respondent: Would choose these market places as they are not only easily accessible but also attuned to our demands....moreover I feel a bit lost in these huge malls...I am more comfortable shopping in my familiar surroundings.

So this revealed the preference of markets over shopping malls. However, there are also others who have shifted their preferences to these new malls, which were revealed through the interactions of the various shop owners at these markets. They are being threatened, not only due to the development of these new outlets, but also because of the steps taken up by the government in the demolition of these old markets for the construction of new, improved marketplaces. As a result, the shopkeepers in these old markets are also being faced with the problem of unemployment and displacement. This anxiety is revealed through the interaction with a shop owner at the Lake Market area, who laments about how the new retail is being a threat to his existence. He says: “Why should people crowd here? This is neither Big Bazaar nor mall. That’s where people go for fun on holidays. Even the government is taking their sides.... with this news of demolition of this market, our struggle for survival has increased manifold. This is a new threat to our livelihood. Though they have assured that we will be provided shops at the basement, it is difficult to foresee in these conditions. But we have no other alternatives than to depend on the government” (Male, 57 years). Talking about the schemes that these new retail outlets in the malls advertise, the shop owner explained: “These companies buy up stocks in mass scale which is the reason why they are able to cut their prices on the products”. When asked why the same is not possible by people like him, he says: “We can’t keep up with their large scale stocks as we neither have the capital, nor the structure to support such a mass scale sale of products”. He explains how the opening up such new outlets have resulted in the transfer of a good percentage of their clients or the buyers to these new ones, resulting in a cut in their share of profits and thereby even threatening their livelihood. But he is optimistic as he feels that “They will come back to me when they need something”.

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5.2.2 Preference of malls over high-street - views of the respondents

However there are the other sections of those who are welcoming these changes, even though the rise of these new outlets has resulted in the demolition of the old markets. They, at the same time, open up new options. So in exchange, people are offered the conveniences and comforts at supermarkets and shopping centres, which are far better than the high street markets. Therefore, it is not by chance that supermarkets and malls are partly replacing traditional markets. There exits another section who are happy about this change; like, for example, this respondent, a young lady (32 years), who prefers malls to traditional markets because she feels: "We can find a huge number of goods in the same place at the same time. Although prices at supermarkets are somewhat more expensive than those offered at traditional markets, many prefer going to the latter as it is more convenient to shop there. The goods sold at supermarkets have clear origin and often have guaranteed quality". She used to buy things at markets, but now she has shifted to shopping at supermarkets. "We don't have to bargain there," she says. "At traditional markets, I have to bargain and I was scolded by sellers many times because I tried to make a low bargain. To tell the truth, sometimes I didn't know what the real prices were. But I didn't want to be overcharged either. At supermarkets I can be assured that I'm offered reasonable prices in most of the cases". Another respondent (Female, 30 years) said: "Here we can look around, compare prices, and also shift brands and also try out new products. At the traditional stores, you will only ask for a new product if you have seen it in advertisements. So you miss out the other brands in that sense. Moreover every store has its share of company representative to push products".

Similarly, another respondent (Male, 46 years) adds on how these changes occurring in Kolkata are permanent ones, and are here to stay. He says:

Interviewer: What are your views regarding the demolition of old markets?
Respondent: These old markets are a part of Kolkata's culture, so it's really sad to see them demolished...
Interviewer: And what do you feel for the new retailing outlets opening in the city?
Respondent: These bazaars are here to stay; it's silly to say they are bad. In any case, they are more egalitarian, that is how it started somewhere in France, as an
effort to bring all things to everybody at a fair price. But definitely it's sad to see the old markets being targeted in the process.

While shopping at the malls or at these supermarkets represent idealized, shopping experience, free from uncontrolled encounters of public places, the high street shopping on the other hand, has a very spontaneous character of its own which is unique in its own way and cannot be found in the malls. The unique character that these market places have is based on the inter-personal relationships that exist between the sellers on one hand and the buyers on the other. Relationships which started with economic front, extends much beyond to develop into a very special bond of trust, dependence and assurance among these people. So the rise of the shopping mall coupled with the demolitions of the market places, strikes at these very foundations of relations which are a rarity in these malls.

Today there is remarkable uniformity in the shops everywhere. Not only that, there has been a change in the attitude towards buying goods; there seems to be a greater force that is working behind our getting and spending in recent times. The city of Kolkata has been gradually turning into a consumer hive. The shops presume customers: people who not only can buy but want to buy. Conspicuous retail works by the dynamic of an intricate social psychology. The bright windows and goods-laden shelves are controlled by the hordes that superficially appear to be controlled by them. At the end of the day, the retailers are dependent on only one factor: how far and how fast can the customer's mindset change? Of course the affluent buy the most; however, they set the tone for all the others. In order to have a clear understanding of the consumer's behaviour, the research called for a study of the consumer's behaviour at different types of marketplaces. Hence, the consumers were questioned at both the malls and at the traditional market places of Gariahat and New Market areas to have a better understanding.
5.3 Changing pattern of shopping – a theoretical analysis

Market place which constitutes an important part of community life has long been neglected as an arena of study by the academicians. Sociologists have not been an exception to this viewpoint. Due to their neglect, what these theorists failed to see was the social nature of the marketplace, which was reflected in the interactions between the buyers on one hand, and the sellers on the other. However, from mid nineteenth and twentieth century onwards, one witnessed a gradual increase in engagements of the theorists from various disciplines in the study of shopping as a social process. So there were the Neo-Marxists who examined the market relationship from the perspectives of false consciousness and commodity fetishism; the psycho-analytics for whom shopping was a destructive activity engendering insatiable desire and the Futurists who saw consumption as a spiritual transaction. Apart from these major theoretical streams there were other perspectives like the historic perspectives, which traced the development of the shopping activity or the architectural perspectives, which dwelt on the structure and form of the new marketplaces - arcades, departmental stores to the modern day shopping malls. According to the Neo-Marxist thinker Wills, capitalism conspires with the commodity form to help perpetuate a false consciousness and commodity fetishism. She characterized the attractive image of commodities as capital in its hypothetical utopian form, promoting a false notion of democratized consumption. This negative aspect of commodity consumption is further understood in the context of the shopping malls that creates awe and intimation by engendering confusion and alienation. A concrete reality of the mass along with anonymity of being a part of the crowd in the malls creates a sense of loss and of absence, which enhances the feeling of alienation. Again, shopping, for Jane Rendell (Moss 1962 re-print 2007), has a symbolic function where goods represent social

114 The first documented spectacle of consumption took place in 1851 when there was an exhibition held by the representatives of 32 nations in the 'Crystal Palace' in Hyde Park, London. The idea behind the display was to show that all human life and cultural endeavour could be represented by exhibiting manufactured goods. The structure was designed to make glass look like crystal and the shape to look like the outline of a palace. Thus the “Crystal Palace was a monument to consumption, the first of its kind, a place where the combined mythologies of consumerism appeared in concentrated form” (Richard, Thomas. 1990 “The Commodity Culture of Victorian England : advertising and the Spectacle” 1851-1914 cited in Mearner 1997, pp: 84)

values. Consumers, according to Rendell, take great pride and often identify, despite what Marx and Neo-Marxist imply, very closely with the implied status, lifestyle or social identity that certain goods project. Theorists belonging to the Futurists school regarded the process of shopping as a sublime, magical and mysterious homecoming to a rediscovered self. The grand shopping structures were seen as the 'last stop of desire' (Brottman 1997, pp: 59). For them, the shopping malls, which were composed of glass and chrome architecture, were not only aesthetically beautiful but also had a spiritual power to transcend an individual into the realm of the metaphysical level. So the moral and ideological components of shopping cannot, at any point, be disentangled from the social and economic determinants of shopping; even though shopping is primarily considered as an economic process. Thus in the work of Barthes (cited in Brottman 1997), shopping is seen as an example of plural text\footnote{A plural text is the kind of text to which we can gain access by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared as the main one. In other words, it is that kind of text which can never be seen in its entirety as a \textit{whole} text (Brottman 1997).}, which can be understood from various perspectives. Shopping, with its vast range of commodities on display, its ongoing process of movement and renewal, may then be re-read several times in order to let each voice to make its presence.

5.3.1 Shopping as an entertainment process

So shopping did not involve the mere act of buying products or commodities. Mall developers are also aware that quite a larger section of those who frequent these places necessarily do not come with the purpose of shopping. So they try to build in stimulations, to orient this section into the act of buying. This is done by condensing all of one's needs and consumer's desires into one place, which heightens the need for the merging of entertainment, shopping and leisure. The most prosaic reason for this is centred on the fact that those who are not there for shopping will at least 'hang around' in the mall if there is something else to do (Crawford 1992; Underhill 2004). These entertainment outlets are varied in nature, which try to attract a variety of people belonging to different age groups from teenagers to old people. So the philosophy that plays behind this is that irrespective of whether one intends or does not intend to buy the
reason to visit the mall is 'the vague desire to have fun'. Mall intends to provide all its visitors to have a good time. It plays with the notion of time, which is evident from the fact that within the mall there is a suspension or nullification of the notion of time. As a result, when one enters the mall, its magical displays and environment transcends the visitor into a world of fantasy, which tends to cast a spell of pure bliss. As a result once inside a mall, the onlooker loses the concern for time. This suspension of time is a true hallmark of carefree leisure. It is thereby said that a key feature that distinguished shopping from the act of buying is time. When shopping is attached with the concept of time it gains a different perspective. The unhurried time spent while undertaking shopping brings in the element of pleasure which, when associated with shopping, changes its character. So the notion of shopping transcends to encompass the acts of looking, visualizing and touching which is associated with the notion of desire rather than need. This is so effectively accomplished that the consumer becomes caught up in a world of Veblenian consumption. Friedberg feels “to shop is to muse in the contemplating mode, an activity that combines diversion, self-gratification, expertise, and physical activity” (Moss 1962 reprinted 2007, pp: xix). The social and most importantly the entertainment element to these places of consumption quickly surpassed the prosaic realities of everyday buying. Shopping became a free time endeavour, being practice of the leisure time. This entertainment quality provided by the shopping activity is often termed as "shoppertainment" which is seen as a synergy made by merging of entertainment qualities of mass media with the retail experiences in ‘buyosphere’. The sense of 'imaginative enjoyment' of products and where they can be consumed is buttressed by how much time, energy and effort go into the marketing of shopping as an entertainment experience. This is cumulated by the rise of the “Lifestyle shopping” which is coming up as a major form of shopping activity in recent times. This new style of shopping is, in fact, way different from the earlier philosophy which was need based. “Lifestyle” shopping encompasses the entire way of living, including the way one perceives oneself. So what one chooses to wear, eat or do is based on and related to one’s image or how one perceives one’s self. So this kind of shopping is often perceived as an egocentric experience where one shops for the pleasure of satisfaction of his/her inner

117 Mention of the term was made by Moss 1962 reprinted 2007; pp: xxv.
self. In this viewpoint shopping is also seen as a transforming experience, a method of becoming a newer or perhaps a slightly changed person. So for these shoppers, shopping extends well beyond the bounds of normal activity and is seen to stand for a multitude of experience (Moss 1962 reprinted 2007). From the postmodern vantage point, with its focus on hyper-reality of spectacles, an abundance of choice combined with a wide array of possible shopping experience, people’s desire to pursue, touch and even interact with products henceforth calls for an understanding of deeper feelings that go beyond the realm of economic aspect of shopping. Shopping is thus read as a plural text, which depicts the postmodern self (Brottman 1997).

This constant movement of the shoppers from mall to mall, store to store in search for newer forms of entertainment and in quest for not just uniqueness of products, but virtually everything according to the critics is detrimental to the overall health and well-being of the society. As the motivation behind this search for entertainment is based on surface appeal, which is insatiable, it leads to a continuous dissatisfaction among the buyers, which culminates into a state of alienation from the realities of life (Rusell Belk and Wendy Bryce, cited in Fjellman cited in Moss 1962 reprinted 2007; Brottman 1997).

5.4 Shopping as an activity

Having established the theoretical preoccupation with shopping as an area of study, the focus now turns towards establishing a working definition of the term. A review of literature brought into forefront two predominant working definitions of the concept of shopping. As per these definitions on one hand, shopping was seen as a ‘recreational activity’ while on the other it was regarded as ‘work’ (Prus and Dawson 1991). By the recreational definition, shopping was seen as interesting, enjoyable, entertaining and leisurely activity. In the other definition, where shopping was seen as work or some kind of a labourious activity, the image associated was more in the nature of an ambiguous, unavoidable and boring activity. While both these definitions seem mutually exclusive to each other, in reality, they were not exclusive in nature. This was based on the reflections made by the shoppers who, during their act of shopping, could
very conveniently switch from one category to the other. Moreover, the act of shopping for these respondents, in some instances, could be both interesting or exciting, but also wearying and frustrating. Interacting with the respondents brought into forefront this dual nature of shopping.

Based on the above definitions of shopping as an activity, the study called for a detailed classification in understanding the concept. In order to capture the diverse ways by which shopping is conceptualized by the various shoppers, shopping as an activity was classified under the categories like: 'pleasure', 'leisure', 'necessity' and 'boring'. Each of these definitions came up in order to understand the way in which shopping as an activity, was perceived by the shoppers. A definition of each of these classifications would lead to a better understanding of the same\textsuperscript{118}. By shopping as a 'pleasure' activity, it was meant that it provided with an enjoyable and entertaining value for the shoppers. For these shoppers, shopping provided with a sense of gratification, which gave them a feeling of happiness. As a 'leisure' activity, again, shopping was seen as providing a break or freedom from the mundane activities. It provided a positive energy, by energizing the shopper and providing an escape from the monotony of everyday life. In comparison to the above two definitions where shopping was seen more as a "recreational activity", the following definitions of shopping look at it from the point of "work" or labourious activity. So when one talks of shopping as a 'necessary' activity, it means that it is needs to be done for the sake of survival. Therefore there is a sense of practicality attached to this concept. It is seen as a need-based activity. Lastly, when one talks of shopping as a 'boring' activity, it is seen as an unavoidable, uninteresting, tiresome and labourious activity. On the basis of these definitions, the shoppers were asked to give their views on their perception on shopping as an activity. What came out can be represented in the form of a Pie chart 4.1 which indicates the perceptions of the shoppers in general.

\textsuperscript{118} This classification of the various conception of 'shopping as an activity' is based with particular reference to this work and on how it was conceptualized by the respondents. Stone (1954) in City Shoppers and Urban Identification: Observations on the Social Psychology of City Life' cited in Woodward et al (2000), talked about four basic types of shoppers which included: economic, for whom primary concern was with price and quality; personal shoppers for whom shopping provided with an opportunity to interact socially; ethical shoppers for whom the criteria of selection of shop was based on moral grounds and finally the apathetic shopper for whom shopping was an unavoidable chore which needed to be done over with at the earliest.
This Pie Chart 4.1 includes the total respondents who were interviewed both at the shopping malls and marketplaces in Kolkata. What came out from this graphic representation is that in majority cases, the respondents felt that shopping was a pleasure-giving activity. However, there were also a significant number of respondents who felt it to be a necessary activity. But if one has to look at the shopping activity in terms of the initial definitions of 'recreation' and 'work' then majority of the respondents saw it as a recreational activity. This fact reestablishes the notion that Kolkata has witnessed a radical change in the perception of shopping as a pleasure and leisure activity, from the time when it was seen more as a necessary activity. So from a time, when the common man shopped for his basic sustenance, Kolkata has graduated a long way, by changing its perception towards looking at shopping as a means of entertainment. It is this changing perception towards shopping which indicates and reconfirms a rise of the new culture, based on consumption.

Having provided with the definition of shopping as conceived by the respondents, the task lies in a deeper understanding of each activity with respect to the shopper's behaviour, when he undergoes shopping. So how does these various shoppers' behavioral action indicate their conception of shopping as an activity? The task as a social researcher demands the exploring of the conditions underlying these contrasting orientations, which brings into limelight the dynamic nature of the consumers. Thus it
refutes the earlier allegations\(^{119}\), where consumers were regarded as 'passive' beings, thereby bringing out the dynamic character of the consumers who are capable of acting, thinking and interacting in the process of shopping\(^{120}\). This dynamic nature of the shoppers was also aptly captured by Stone\(^{121}\) (1954) in his pioneering work, where he categorized shoppers into four types: the economic, the personalized, the ethical and finally the apathetic. He defined an economic shopper as one whose preoccupation is mainly with the price and quality of the goods or services. The personalized shopper rated the opportunity for social interaction over monetary transactions, whereas for the ethical shoppers, the criteria for selection of the retail outlet depended on moral issues (like environmentally friendly outlets). For the apathetic shopper, shopping was simply an unavoidable chore or a mundane activity to be taken care of in everyday life. Categorizing shoppers as per their attitude towards shopping is definitely a difficult task and hence this categorization was faced with criticism from the academicians. In this study however, at various points, there is a similar resemblance of the nature of shoppers. But there is an absence of the last category of shoppers.

5.4.1 Shopping as a 'boring' activity

When a respondent defines the nature of shopping as an activity, it is basically decided upon by his/her perception towards the same. However, as a researcher, the need was felt into looking at each respondent’s overall behaviour so as to gauge his/her actual perception. Hence the respondents were asked both direct and indirect questions which helped in reflecting their shopping behaviour. So what now follows is a

\(^{119}\) Criticism, which came mainly from the neo-marxist school of thought.

\(^{120}\) While conducting the field study, both these definitions gained importance and interestingly shoppers defined their activity on four criteria which were not exclusive in nature. A detailed study on this will be taken up in the subsequent section.

\(^{121}\) Stone, G. (1954) 'City Shoppers and Urban Identification: Observations on the Social Psychology of City Life'; cited in Woodward et al (2000). His categorization came under attack by the contemporary research on shopping in Sociology and Social anthropology in a move to explore the routines and rituals involved in the act of shopping. The theorists try to demonstrate the ways in which shopping activity and consumption take place in a diverse cultural field (Campbell 1987; Douglas and Isherwood 1979; McCracken 1988; Appadurai 1986; Miller 1998). The methodology was based on ethnographic and textual methods vis-à-vis the survey research used by Stone (1954).
detailed definition of these various activities of shopping. To start with we will take up
the views of those respondents for whom shopping is seen as a ‘boring’ activity. As
shopping for these respondents is seen more as a dull, labourious activity, it is natural that
they spend minimum time on this. When the respondents were asked in the interview
about the maximum time they spent for shopping, there was a unanimous answer that
they spent not more than half an hour for it. As they did not enjoy this activity, so in
majority of the cases, they preferred shopping alone without any companions so that there
was no unnecessary delay in the act. This is revealed in the remarks of a respondent who
said: “if I am alone, I can accomplish the job at a much faster pace, which suits me as I
hate shopping” (Male, 33 years). When they were asked about the nature of preference of
goods, on the basis of price verses quality, the respondents showed their preference of
price over quality. However, for all of them, the products should have the features of
usefulness and practicality over any other aspects. All these reestablish the fact that for
these respondents, shopping is undoubtedly a boring activity.

5.4.2 Shopping as a ‘necessary’ activity

The next set of respondents included those for whom shopping was a
necessary activity. These respondents included quite a major number in the study. They
perceived shopping was as a need-based activity. It is true that they are not allergic to the
concept of shopping, but at the same time are not very excited at the prospect of spending
immense time on the same. This is revealed in their time spent for shopping, which
ranges from half an hour to a maximum of two hours and which they prefer to do during
the weekdays, usually after the office hours. In majority of the cases, these shoppers are
accompanied, either by their colleagues, spouses or family members. They are seldom
seen to go shopping ‘alone’. When asked about the reason for this, one of the respondents
said, “As it is, shopping is a very mundane activity; hence if someone accompanies me, it
makes the process less tedious” (Female, 44 years). However, while shopping, they
choose their products based on the criteria of usefulness and practicality, rather than
going for decorative items. So they are very rational in their act of choosing and buying
the products. As a result, for them, quality of the products plays a very important role over the price because they are not ready to compromise on the quality of the items.

So in both the above categories, the act of shopping did not provide any joy or happiness to the shoppers. They consider it to be a part of their regular life and hence not interested in spending much time for the same. Interestingly the respondents in both the categories tried to spend as less time as possible while shopping. This reconfirms their aversion towards shopping. However, they differed in the perception of the quality verses price aspect and also on the issue of shopping company. Having talked about the categories for whom shopping is seen as a regular and mundane activity, we now turn our attention to those shoppers for whom the act of shopping provides pleasure and enjoyment. They are the target sector for this study as their behaviour, to a great extent, indicates the changing perception of the people of Kolkata towards the concept of shopping as an activity.

5.4.3 Shopping as a ‘pleasure’ activity

First we take up those respondents for whom shopping is a pleasure activity. These are the majority of the respondents who were earmarked while interviewing, both at the shopping malls and the marketplaces. Shopping for them is not just an act of acquiring goods or commodities, but it provides them with an enjoyable experience. Hence for them, shopping is a major source of recreation and entertainment. This was evident from the amount of time they spent in the entire act of shopping. A vast majority of the respondents vouched for spending a minimum of two to four hours in this activity. Apart from that, there was also quite a number, who claimed that they loved spending almost half the day shopping. The respondents, who claimed spending considerable time in shopping, also preferred shopping at the weekends, rather than weekdays. Weekends are the time for leisurely activities and shopping provides a good opportunity to visit the buzzing marketplaces or the shopping malls where they are engaged in multiple activities. Hence these respondents feel that shopping at weekends is like a fiesta, where the entire act can be done while seeking pleasure out of it.
Next these shoppers were enquired about the criteria of selection of the goods or products. In most cases, for the shoppers the goods are selected on the basis of usefulness and practicality. Nevertheless, there were also quite a number of the respondents for whom products reflecting social status were also an important criteria for purchase. This category of respondents was also quite high in number, which indicated that the respondents are conscious of their position and are eager to show off their status through the purchase of goods and products. Another feature, which was also in demand in the choice of products, was the uniqueness in quality. There was a small section of the shoppers, who also preferred the goods having the decorative aspect. The Pie Chart 4.2 below, gives the graphic representation of the demand of products based on the criteria:

![Pie Chart: 4.2](image)

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

A typical characteristic of the new consumer culture is the increasing consciousness of the consumers, regarding the quality of the products versus the price (Pie Chart 4.3). The respondents are conscious of purchase of good products and for that the price does not seem a restraint. This indicates that for the good quality of the product they are ready to pay any price for the product. For these category buyers the mall is undoubtedly the preferred place for shopping where there is availability of various range and products. Hence in the words of one of the respondent: "Many things are available under single roof, rather going to selected places to shop" (Male, 55 years).
Another characteristic, by which one can deduce that shopping is seen as part-time activity, is the mode of companion who comes along with the respondents while undertaking shopping. It has been observed in this category, that these people are usually accompanied by friends or family members, while shopping. The respondents accompanied by friends or family, are also a very common feature seen in the shopping malls. This too indicates that shopping is not only just an economic activity, but also has an important social dimension. The importance of a shopping companion is seen in the work of Shields (1992), where the author talks of three types of companions\textsuperscript{122}. The comments and the approval of the companions, create a major impact in the purchasing behaviour of the shoppers. Hence, the shopper tries to bring along those whose opinion he/she trusts. In case of the respondents (both at the malls and the marketplaces), it was seen that the friends and family members, rather than work colleagues, mostly accompanied the respondents.

\textsuperscript{122} The first type of companions is the one who is not the regular shopping companion of the respondent. Rather they happen to be with the respondent at the time of purchase; the second type of shopping companion is who with whom the respondent is very comfortable with and whose decision has a major role in the purchase of the commodity. This companion gives informal opinions and has a vast resource of inter-textual knowledge with reference to products' quality and price. The third category includes the spouse or the male/female friend whose comments are sought irrespective of their nature of knowledge.
5.4.4 Shopping as a ‘leisure’ activity

The last category of shopping activity, where it is perceived as a leisure activity, share more or less similar features like the above category. As a leisure activity, shopping is viewed to have the feature of entertainment capacity. Leisure, in its modern sense, has already followed a complex evolution. The activity which gained predominance and roots in the post Renaissance period was able to move out of the elitist confines to be embraced by a large section of the population, who gained the purchasing capacity in the modern times. So for the masses, leisure was simply a break from the grueling regimen of work. In this respect, one should be quick to point out that shopping is not the only activity which provides leisure; there are other forms of entertainment like theme parks, theatres and so on. To situate the respondents belonging to this category, it was necessary to understand the evolution of this concept so as to situate it vis-à-vis the other forms.

The respondents in this category love the act of shopping whereby a sweeping majority of them are involved in shopping for a minimum of two to four hours to more than half a day. They also claimed that weekend shopping was preferred to one on weekdays. Interestingly, all the respondents here preferred either their spouses/family or friends to accompany them. There is no specific preference of friend over family as observed in the earlier category. The usefulness and practicality of the product is again a priority for them as found in other categories; however there is also a demand for uniqueness in quality and of goods reflecting social status. Price is not the major factor in determining the choice of products. Hence, quality once again gained predominance over price. Thus in general, the features of shopping as a leisure and pleasure activity are somewhat similar in nature.

Having discussed the perception of the respondents, regarding shopping as an activity, the focus now turns towards the nature of activity that the respondents are engaged in during the act of shopping. The importance of this question is seen from the fact that it would help to indicate the nature of orientation of the people, when they visit the markets in general and shopping malls in particular. It would also help to have an
answer to the main theme of the study: the rise of consumerism in Kolkata. So when a consumer goes for shopping, what are the kinds of activities that they are engaged in? A study of the nature of consumption would help in giving a clearer view on the culture of consumption.

5.5 Changing perception of the city towards the rise of shopping malls.

Having described the two markets, in this study the next task was to understand the viewpoints of the recent developments in the retail business, from the respondents who visited these marketplaces. These respondents’ viewpoints were an important part on the study, as they came up with an unbiased opinion about how they perceived the rise of the culture of shopping malls in Kolkata. So the aim was to target those consumers who visit these marketplace and to understand their views on this new culture of consumerism. Out of a target size of 150 consumers, the final respondents contacted at both these marketplaces came up to 112 in number. They were enquired mainly on their perceptions about the rise of the new shopping malls and the nature of questions was sometimes open-ended and sometimes closed. The charts below give an overall conception of the distribution of the respondents on the basis of age, sex and occupational characteristics.

5.5.1 Description of the respondents

It is interesting to know that the predominant age group includes those in between 15-25 years. The chart 4.1.1 shows the diagrammatic representation of the age groups of shoppers frequenting the market place. A major portion of the respondents of this age group of 15-25 years includes those who are college students. For these students, the market place seems to be a favorite place to hang out with their peer groups. The next category of age group, which frequents the marketplace, is between 25-35 years. The composition of this age group shows the respondents to be either working professionals or housewives. These groups frequent these places mainly, during the later part of the day till late evenings. As found in the malls, in marketplace too, the composition of the crowd changes at various times of the day. So in the later part of the day just as one witnesses a
crowd comprising of the college-goers and housewives similarly at night, the markets are crowded with married couples or people of the age group above 30 years.

Chart 4.4.1

Age distribution of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years range</th>
<th>No of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Below 15 yrs</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-25 yrs</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35 yrs</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-45 yrs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 45 yrs</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

The proportion of the female respondents were more in number than the male. This is represented in the following Pie Chart 4.4.2. Of the total respondents, the married comprised only about 33%; hence the majority of the respondents were unmarried. The inclusion of this gender difference was important, as it helped in a detailed understanding of the characteristics of the sample that was taken for study as indicated in the Pie Chart 4.4.3

Pie Chart 4.4.2

Sex composition of the respondents

- Male: 66%
- Female: 34%

Pie Chart 4.4.3

Marital Status

- Married: 33%
- Not Married: 67%

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
The respondents were later divided on the basis of their working status (Pie Chart 4.4.4) and occupational patterns (Pie Chart 4.4.5). Thus the category included working professionals, students, housewives and retired. These further divisions on the basis of sex, marital state and employment background of the respondents, helped in understanding the effect of consumerism across various social stratifications. The details of the employment background have however been already discussed in the earlier chapters and hence, requires no further discussions.

Pie Chart 4.4.4

Working Status of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working</th>
<th>Not working</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

Pie Chart 4.4.5

Nature of occupation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working/professional</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Retired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5.2 Choice of the preferred marketplace

The presence of the respondents at these two marketplaces itself indicated their choice of their shopping destination. However, it was necessary to understand their views on the shopping malls. When they were asked about their preferred choice of marketplace among the options that included Bazaars, Shopping malls and Roadside stalls, majority of them vouched for bazaars. Similar was the case when the respondents at the malls were asked about their choice of shopping place, they went for malls. If the views of the entire respondents were taken (combining both the marketplaces 112 and at the malls 115) then malls came out as the preferred choice of shopping whether they were at the malls or at the marketplaces. The pie charts 4.5 and 4.6 below indicate the choice of the preferred place for shopping for the respondents at the New Market and the Gariahat Market and the total respondents of the field.
It is interesting to note that quite a large number of respondents at the marketplace regarded malls as the preferred choice for shopping, even though they are seen shopping at the bazaar. Rather than questioning their actions, what is important, is the acceptance of the fact that, even though these respondents are buying at the roadside stalls or the bazaars, for them malls are the ideal place for shopping. They were also asked about their perception of whether they believed malls were better places to shop to which there was an overwhelming majority who agreed to the notion.

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
Going further into the study, what was required was an understanding of the viewpoints regarding the rise of the shopping malls of those who shopped at the bazaars or the roadside stalls. They were asked two questions: firstly whether they visited shopping malls. Depending on the positive answer of the first the second question was the frequency of their visits. The tables below (5.1.1 and 5.1.2) which are self explanatory in nature, describe the responses of these shoppers.

### Table 5.1.1 Do you visit shopping mall?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Working/professional</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Retired</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Roadside stalls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bazaars</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

For those who have given a positive reply regarding whether they visited the malls, the following category revealed the rate of frequency in visiting these shopping malls.

### Chart 5.1.2 If you visit shopping mall, then how often?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Working/professional</th>
<th>Housewife</th>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Retired</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Those who visit the bazaar, more out of them who also visit malls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in a week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in two weeks</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in month</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in year</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Those who visit the road stalls more out of them who also visit malls</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in a week</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in two weeks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in year</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher
So the results indicate that in majority of the cases, the respondents who buy from the bazaars or the roadside stalls do visit the malls, though not on a very regular basis. It was concluded that majority of them visited the malls, if not for shopping, regularly. The average visit may be once in a month. The category of students is more fluctuating while for the working professionals it is more or less an average of once in a month. From the above discussions, it can be concluded that despite shopping in the bazaars or the roadside stalls, the average people of Kolkata are not averse to the new shopping outlets that are being developed in recent times. As a sociologist, the task was to find out how the new culture of consumption has affected the people.

5.6 Respondents’ viewpoints on Shopping malls as a new space for consumption

It is this perception of the people that I, as a researcher, wanted to deduce from their responses. There may be several reasons economic or situational as to why they do not shop at the malls. The aim is not to find these issues, but to understand the inner desires of the people, as they are the potential customers for the malls. To have a perception of these respondents’ views towards the new mode of culture of shopping that has grasped society, the respondents were asked to voice their opinion on the issue. In order to have an unbiased view, the respondents were all chosen from the marketplaces of Gariahat and New Market areas. The views of the respondents were divided into three major sectors, depending on the background profile of the participants, which was categorised into students, housewives and the working professionals. The classification of the same is represented in the Pie Chart 4.4.5. The views of each category of the participants, will be discussed below.

5.6.1 Category – Student

Taking up the first category, which was the students who constitute major portion of the respondents, it was seen that there was a very mixed reaction from them. A common view that these students share is how the rise of the shopping malls has led to the change of the city’s image; as one respondent claims, “It shows the progress of the city, with new shopping malls springing up all over the city” (Male, 21 years) and another who says, “Good for the image of the city, helps to match with the first world” (Male, 24
years) and yet a third claims “Many things available under single roof, particularly we do not have to go to selected places to shop” (Female, 18 years). Malls thus come out as places where one gets a wide range of products of good quality under a single roof. People are happy getting quality products without the hassles of bargaining: “With the standard of living increasing as compared to other cities, it’s good for Calcutta because it’s a metropolitan city.....one can get lots of options and good quality” (Female, 18 years). On the contrary, there are some who feel that due to these malls the roadside stalls are suffering as a consequence. So for these respondents, malls are “Not good for the economy of the small sellers like those of the roadside stalls. People think that roadside products are of inferior quality. Their market has shrunk” (Male, 20 years).

Another important view comes up from a respondent when she says: “Malls are good, because one gets ideas about various things” (Female, 21 years). Browsing through the products displayed at the malls, exposes the shopper to a variety of information which otherwise, would not have been possible. So even if at that point of time s/he is not interested in buying the products, the information is used for future references. But from the students’ point of view, malls come out as major places for hangouts and as a new style statement. Thus, in the words of some student respondents: “It is good to shop at malls as it is a fashion and a new style statement. It is good to say to friends” (Male, 19 years) or the mall is simply “— a good place to hang out with friends, comfortable and peaceful.....” even though it might be “......class exclusive, price too high”(Female, 21 years). Many however prefer to just browse through the shops instead of buying the products from the outlets. As this respondent feels: “Good for window shopping, not applicable for all class” (Male, 20 years). For many others, shopping or hanging out at malls is considered a mark of increasing social status which gives them an exclusivity among the peer groups. There are however many others, who object to this new trend and for them “Shopping at mall has become a fashion, rather than a necessity. Prices are quite high and unaffordable for the mediocre people” (Female, 23 years). A very strong view was voiced by one of the respondents who felt that such a new culture is not an indigenous one but is imposed by the global forces. He feels that Indians “have a tendency to copy the foreign world”; however “there is a huge difference between the rich and poor. The GDP of our country is not
comparable with the first world; hence we should not copy all their culture” (Male, 25 years).

5.6.2 Category – Housewives

When the housewives were contacted for their views, a majority of them had a very positive viewpoint towards the new structural changes occurring at the retail sphere. Shopping malls have made life convenient for housewives who not only shop for everyday use but also see shopping as an enjoyable experience. In the words of one of the respondents, shopping malls represent the ideal shopping paradise where there is “no bargaining, but climatic control with air conditioner and, quality assurance” (Female, 33 years). For them, even though it is “too high price, one cannot bargain” however “it is easier to shop, as it is time saving” (Female 35 years). These spaces for shopping, act as a multidimensional sphere for entertainment. Hence for them, these are the ideal places, where the entire family “can spend nice time with children, and get good ideas on products” (Female 42 years). That is why during the weekends, these malls become the preferred choice of destination for leisure activities like watching movies and eating, apart from shopping.

5.6.3 Category – Working Professionals

“All under one roof, can be accessed by credit card” (Male, 44 years); “Time consumption is less, shopping becomes easy, bargain free” (Male, 36 years) “and easy and hassle free, though a pinch in the pocket sometimes” (Male, 29 years) - these are some of the expressions of the working professionals, when they were contacted to know their views on the new shopping structures that were developing in Kolkata. So for them, the efficiency of the malls lies in the existence of a variety of products under a single roof. When asked about their views regarding the socio-cultural changes that Kolkata is undergoing with the rise of the consumer culture one of the respondents said that shopping malls makes the act of shopping “convenient and pleasurable”, its “pleasant and comfortable environment has a positive effect for Kolkata” (Male, 32 years). Malls are seen
to be a "good reflection of the phenomenon called globalisation" (Male, 38 years). So for them, malls are seen as "nice technical enhancements", which are a must for Kolkata. as "being a metropolotant, Kolkata has a huge population and needs good shopping places" (Female, 34 years). However, there are quite a few respondents who think that these malls have led to "unnecessary wastage of money. It has become a craze for the young generation and creates a competitive attitude among youngsters" (Male 55 years). They feel that malls create a pressure among the peer groups, which forces them to spend money on unnecessary extravagant items and thus "leads to impulsive unplanned shopping" (Female, 45 years). Moreover, they also felt that shopping at malls occur at a very impersonal level which is of no comparison to the kind to relationship that exists in a traditional marketplace. Thus one of the respondents pointed out that malls are "not customized, relationship with shop owners not established, nobody is there to guide the buyers" (Male, 53 years). Going by some stronger emotions, some respondents feel that there is "nothing different" regarding the kind of products that the malls display, and feel that one can get "better products at cheaper price outside" (Female, 30 years). So malls, according to them are "not for middle class". This "shopping mall culture indulges in unnecessary profligacy" (Female, 37 years). It is thus very difficult to conclude in a single statement, the collected sentiments of all the respondents. There is a mixed reaction to the mall culture that is coming up in Kolkata. However, the impact of it is so strong that one cannot negate the existence. Moreover it has a pervading character which affects the buying behavior of the shoppers.

5.7 Nature of differences in the product demand across age and gender division

While talking about the buying behaviour of the respondents, it will be necessary to note that in this study, an attempt was made to understand the same, through the products that the respondents purchased in the malls. Thus these respondents were asked to rank their choice of products according to the most frequently purchased items. The result of their choices is indicted in the following pie chart 4.8.
Interestingly, for both male and female respondents, clothes were the first choice when they went for shopping. However if one looked at the other choices, a gender bias towards certain products, for both male and female can definitely be understood. For example, just as sports goods and music items were in great demand among the male respondents, these were found to be very low in the priority list for the female respondents. Similarly, cosmetics and jewellery items were among the top priority for the female respondents, while these items were of not much demand by the male counterpart. The
chart 4.9 indicates the preference of the products, on the basis of male and female respondents.

As per the diagram, which represents the choice of the products with respect to the male-female aspect, it can be seen as mentioned earlier that in case of the male consumers the demand for the products like clothes, music items, electronic goods, household products, books and footwear is high. Whereas, for the female respondents, the demand for clothes is the highest, which is followed by demands for jewellery items, cosmetics, household products, books and footwear. For both the male and female respondents, it is seen that clothes, household products, books and footwear are equally in demand. While men prefer electronic items, sports goods and music more than the female respondents, similarly female respondents prefer jewellery items and cosmetics more than the male counterparts. The basic gendered preference over goods can thus be observed from this aspect. The chart 3.0 below will also clarify in details, the demands of the various respondents who are divided as per the occupation status. If one looks into these figures, then one will see the changes in the nature of preference of the products not only on the basis of sex, but also across age and professions. This enriches the entire study as it is observed that for the male students, the preference is over clothes, music items and electronic gadgets. For the female students it is clothes, jewellery and books. For the housewives it is clothes, household products and cosmetics. For the retired persons it is household items next to clothes. For the working male professionals it is again clothes, electronic gadgets and household products and music items. For the female counterparts it is however, clothes followed by cosmetics and books and household products. Another observation which has made, is the preference of books over any other commodity. This can be diagnosed as a basic cultural attribute of Kolkata. Though this comes as a very general remark that the Kolkatans love reading books, this notion can be backed by data, which indicates books to be in the top priority list while shopping household products.
### Table: 5.1.3 Ranking products as per male-female preference of the students, working professionals, retired persons & Housewives

(Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>Jewellery items</th>
<th>Electronic gadgets</th>
<th>Sports goods</th>
<th>Cosmetics</th>
<th>Household products</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Music items</th>
<th>Footwear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male products ranking – students</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female products ranking – students</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife product ranking</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired male product ranking</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male products ranking – working professionals</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>98</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female products ranking working professionals</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>91</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>431</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>485</td>
<td>518</td>
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### Ranking products preference of the students, working professionals, and retired persons (male respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>Jewellery items</th>
<th>Electronic gadgets</th>
<th>Sports goods</th>
<th>Cosmetics</th>
<th>Household products</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Music items</th>
<th>Footwear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male products ranking – students</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retired male product ranking</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male products ranking – working professionals</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>40</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>145</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Ranking products preference of the students, working professionals, and housewives (female respondents)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clothes</th>
<th>Jewellery items</th>
<th>Electronic gadgets</th>
<th>Sports goods</th>
<th>Cosmetics</th>
<th>Household products</th>
<th>Books</th>
<th>Music items</th>
<th>Footwear</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female products ranking – students</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewife product ranking</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female products ranking working professionals</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>71</td>
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<td>113</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>93</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>571</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>342</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.8 Browsing and Window-Shopping as an integral part of shopping activity

The process of shopping is of a very complex nature. Being a shopper it is usually assumed to be synonymous with being a purchaser. Yet shopping does not always involve the act of purchasing or buying products. Purchasing of products is merely one event which may or may not culminate in the shopping process. In this sense, shopping gains a broader definition whereby it refers to a process; a social practice of exploration and sightseeing (Shields 1992). This process often takes up several leisure forms like browsing and window-shopping. Browsing is a very important part of the process of shopping where the consumer can just glance through the products displayed, without actually purchasing the same. So a shopper, in this process of shopping, takes up extended time in glancing through the products which may or may not culminate into significant/insignificant purchases. In is in this ‘just looking’ type of shopping that the consumers are sometimes engaged in non-rational spontaneous purchases which is none other than the impulsive purchases\textsuperscript{123}. So it is true that unplanned purchases occur when the consumer’s attention gets diverted from the search mission in course of browsing. Catching and keeping the shoppers’ attention is one of the important marketing techniques that the shop owners depend upon, for their sale of the products. It was revealed though the interactions with the consumers that many of them who happen to browse the products at the malls are usually engaged in shopping from their para\textsuperscript{124} shops. So what is that major factor, which leads a shopper into the act of browsing in these malls? It is basically the curiosity that pulls the consumers into these new shopping places. In the words of a respondent (Male, 59 years) who was interviewed in the Gariahat Market, \textquotedblleft I visited the C3 in The Gariahaat Mall because I was in that locality and saw the announcements of cheapest deals; so I decided to check it out. Moreover you also get to know their schemes even while sitting at home, through their process of advertising, which is distributed through the morning papers. So having seen these discounts and offers, I was curious to see them myself. Hence I visited the mall\textquotedblright. It is true that the sheer curiosity factor may bring into the mall some consumers, who are

\textsuperscript{123} The detailed discussion on the impulsive purchase will be dealt with subsequently in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{124} These shops are small roadside stalls, which cater to the needs of the locality (para) where they are situated. Kolkata has a large number of such shops which cater to people’s everyday needs.
interested in checking or browsing through the products; but the question arises, does it necessarily culminate into the act of purchasing the products? It is noted that browsing behaviour does not always culminate into unplanned purchases. For some consumers, browsing in the outlets before purchasing products is a conscious act from their side which helps them to gather information about the availability of the range of products which they plan to purchase. Hence through the acts of browsing and window-shopping, the consumers become aware of new products or get a comparative view on different range of products which help in their purchasing decisions. But it may be that having acquired this knowledge, the same consumers might go to buy the products from their preferred shops where they shopped earlier. This is often the case as revealed in the conversation with a shop owner at the Gariahat market\textsuperscript{125}. Going back to the issue of browsing, it is often concluded that browsing helps in the surfacing of latent demands\textsuperscript{126} of products which come into the forefront for the buyers. Focus lies on when and how the consumers change from a browsing mode to a search mode for a particular product. Search gives the consumer a better idea of what they might reasonably expect from a product and gives a definite focus to their act of shopping. Thus the shop owners create an environment by which they try to redirect the consumer behaviour from a browsing mode into a search mode, to finally culminate into the purchasing mode. The aim of the design of the malls is to prolong the shopper's attention on shopping. The spacious designs of each individual outlet and the strategic arrangements of the products, make it easier to catch the shopper's attention. So the shop window display, aims at attracting the consumer's gaze. While the consumers are in the mode of gazing at the products, their mind is in a state of trance whereby they are not able to codify all the signals into a definite conscious choice. Thus the display of the product should be such as to initially arouse the consumer from the state of stupor into the realm of consciousness. This then, is followed by a series of signs and symbols, which unfold in meanings and significances and culminate into the act of purchasing or rejecting the product. Thus the simple act of browsing has a very complex relation to the entire process of shopping. This is brought

\textsuperscript{125} The excerpts of the interview with the shop owner are given in the following page

\textsuperscript{126} A study on the effect of browsing in surfacing the latent demand for products was done by Earl and Potts (2000) where they talked of various types of latent demands which the shoppers have.
out in the work of Baum, "The Art of Decorating Dry Goods Windows and Interiors" (cited in Friedberg 1991). He talks of the different techniques used by the shop owners for catching the interest of the window-shoppers and turning them into absorbed spectators. So he says:

"How can a window sell goods? By placing them before the public in such a manner that the observer has a desire for them and enters the store to make the purchase. Once in, the customer may see other things she wants, and no matter how much she purchases under these conditions the credit of the sale belongs to the window"


Similar view is also reflected in the work of Trentmann (2004) who talked about the use of the display windows by small shop owners to grab attention of the customers.

This illusory window very aptly draws the attention and curiosity of the passersby and helps in attracting the consumer into the circles of consumption. For example, in any garment shop, the use of life-like mannequins draped in the latest trendy wear creates a great visual impact among the observers, who try to imagine themselves in the same clothes and get incited into taking further look into the shop. So there was the element of 'identity construction' through the nature of display mode. That is why the decoration of the shop windows is done with immense care. The idea is to provide the shoppers a tantalizing view of the products, to capture their eye and to maintain a sense of mysticism so as to draw them within the shop's environment. The window frames a tableau, pacing it behind glass which, apart from being alluring, at the same time make it inaccessible to the viewers. In this context, it would be interesting to note the shop owner's (Male, 56 years) opinion on the concept of display and the way it affects, in alluring the consumers. The following interaction revealed his opinion:

"Interviewer: What do you feel on the notion of shop décor? Do you feel that it has any role in attracting consumers?
Respondent: Yes it definitely adds to the shop's attraction...in recent times the emphasis on shop display has gained importance...that's why we are forced to spend quite an amount on the décor of the shop which is due to alter expectations from the buyers...

Interviewer: How is that affecting your sale?
Respondent: You see, for example, earlier we used to sell the products keeping them stored in large cartons...and did not care for the display of products.....but
now we have made showcases, displaying various items like soaps, shampoos or whatever products our shop has...as a result, people are aware of the availability of the products.

Interviewer: Did you add any new products for increasing the variety?
Respondent: Yes, in fact there are many customers who visit the malls and are interested in products that we do not have. These clients inform us about the new products and we get those for them...this helps us to increase our variety and at the same time satisfy the consumer’s demands. We have thus increased and added new products to compete with the supermarkets.

Interviewer: What is the reason that makes them buy from you and not from the malls?
Respondent: May be because they trust us ...some of these clients have an association with us going back to quite a long time.....so they prefer us over the malls...you can say that it’s the relation that exists through generations. As a result, our consumers trust us and rely on us.

Interviewer: What other ways do you use to encourage and attract consumers to compete with the supermarkets or malls?
Respondent: We have seen that in the malls or these supermarkets they offer several schemes to attract the customers...schemes which help in facilitating in conducting a hassle-free shopping...seeing these schemes succeeding, we have also tried to incorporate some of them. So now we offer attractive schemes like free home delivery system, small gifts or special discounts against big purchases and even encourage buying through credit system.

Interviewer: What is this credit system?
Respondent: By this system many of the families get their products or groceries on monthly basis delivered to their homes through the system of credit...where they get the products and pay later. Usually those with limited income find this system very amiable and this also strengthens our relations with the clients leading to stronger bond with the customers. Do tell me how many supermarkets in the mall would comply with such needs of people? We definitely have gained through this system of credit.

5.8.1 The Bandwagon effect

In this respect another important observation that comes up in the study of these marketplaces is the existence of the bandwagon effect, which has already been discussed, in the earlier chapter. While surveying the two market places the existence of this effect was clearly visible among a minority section of the populace. Since the opening of the economy, Kolkata, like the other cities has been exposed to a large number of foreign brands of which some, of them have gained popularity among the people. The popularity of these brand names has raised the expectations of some in
acquiring its products. However, as in many cases, some of these products had a high price range, which was not affordable to a larger section of population. As a result the effect of bandwagon was seen to be prevalent in these cases. A walk through some of the major markets would give one an idea of the extent of this phenomenon. For example, if one went through the Lindsay Street near the New Market area, one would notice the huge sale of garments with the Nike or the Adidas logo installed in them. These are not the authentic branded products but cheaper substitutes have made way into the wardrobe of those who are aware of the existence of such brands but are unable to afford them. So as this teenager, (Male, 16 years) says:

*Interviewer: Where do you usually buy your clothes?*
*Respondent: It depends...sometimes from New Market or other times from Shyambazaar.*

*Interviewer: Are you aware of branded clothes?*
*Respondent: Yes*

*Interviewer: Like?*
*Respondent: Pantaloons, Westside, Nike, Adidas...*

*Interviewer: Do you buy these branded clothes?*
*Respondent: Not always, but I always have the fascination to buy them... their prices are quite over my budget... *

*Interviewer: Are you aware of the offer schemes that these clothes have....I mean the seasonal discounts or the 'buy one get one free' offers?*
*Respondent: Yes, I am aware, and have purchased one or two ...but the problem is, that I do not get the right colour or the size during these discount sales.*

*Interviewer: So what do you do?*
*Respondent: I go for the local products...there are quite a large number of cheaper products of the same make...and some of them are so good that it’s difficult to distinguish them from the original versions and it comes within my budget.*

*Interviewer: What makes you buy these substitutes over some other products?*
*Respondent: Wearing a Nike or a Reebok tee shirt does make a difference among your peer group over wearing a plain shirt.*

Yet it is also true that there are also a large number, who purchase these products without being aware of what the symbols installed in the shirts indicate. The brand awareness is also selective to a particular section and hence does not encompass the general masses. So those who buy these products are attracted by the low price range that these products offer and may not have anything to do with the concept of brands.
Alternatively there are others, for whom the source of enjoyment in the process of shopping is located at the multidimensional nature of this process. It was observed that the common activities which the shopper engaged him/herself (apart from buying goods) in while visiting the marketplace or malls, include window shopping/ browsing, eating, and watching movies. Thus in the word of a respondent: “I love to shop... I enjoy it, basically because I use it to fill in time.... When I go shopping, I look at people and what they are doing. That’s all a part of the entertainment of it” (Female, 20 years). The same view is echoed through the interaction, which took place with an elderly gentleman who said:

Interviewer: What is your opinion on the rise of the malls as new places of consumption?
Respondent: Malls are a new way of life... it’s the future.
Interviewer: So how exactly does it affect your lifestyle?
Respondent: What can’t you do here? You can shop, watch movies, use the food plaza, even get a haircut...this is where Kolkatta will spend its evenings a few years from now. On top of that you can even have a peaceful stroll or walk within its compounds without the hassles of the traffic or even to some extent, the weather...

(The respondent, who was a retired old citizen male, of 65 years and staying in Salt Lake, had chosen City Centre for his morning and evening walks, as it provided him shelter from the rains that would otherwise have hampered his activity).

5.9 Activities of respondents while undergoing shopping activity

On the basis of the above observation, the respondents were asked to rank their activities while shopping as per their priority. The results that came up were very interesting in nature. It has been already said that the respondents were interviewed at both shopping malls and marketplaces. When the views of the aggregate respondents from both these places were taken, it showed that in majority of the cases, the shoppers preferred engaging in window shopping to any other activities. Shopping of goods and commodities involved the second important activity, which was followed by eating and watching movies. It should be noted that this representation included the views from both
the areas. The Pie Chart 5.1 below indicates the proportion of respondents engaged in each activity in the marketplaces.

**Pie Chart 5.1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Window Shopping</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of respondents' activity while shopping at the marketplaces</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Pie Chart 5.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity in mall</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Window Shopping</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

So an interesting aspect that was revealed was the difference in opinion among the respondents who were interviewed within the shopping mall. The Pie Chart 5.2 above gives a diagrammatic representation of the respondents' activities within the shopping malls of Kolkata. What came out from the above representation was a huge diversion of interests. Within the shopping malls (specifically for the City Centre and Forum Mall), apart from the various outlets of the goods and products, there existed a large number of restaurants, eating joints and movie multiplexes. These resulted in attracting a large crowd who often dropped in for the purpose of visiting these places. So, when the respondents at the malls were asked to rank their activities within the mall, the following results were brought into the forefront. Watching movies came as the of top activity priority which the respondents engaged, in within the malls. This is undoubtedly true for both the malls: City Centre and Forum each of which has huge multiplexes theatres. (The same cannot be said for the The Gariahaat Mall, which has no theatres within its complex.). The next activity in which respondents engaged themselves was shopping, followed by eating and window-shopping. It is interesting to note the way window-shopping is seen as the least frequent activity in the ranking given by the respondents. So does it mean that in Kolkata malls where window-shopping is thought to be one of the major activities, it has taken a backstage? Does it indicate that people visiting the malls in Kolkata, are aware of
their necessities and do not like to prevaricate on the issues of shopping? This can be clarified by studying the other parameter, which was the rate of impulsive purchasing behaviour of these respondents.

5.9.1 Impulsive buying: a new character among the shoppers of Kolkata

Human activities have been often been said to be driven by impulses which are sometimes bio-chemically and psychologically stimulated. It is the later aspect which is the focus of this study. Thus impulse for them is not a conscious act; it is rather based on a spontaneous reaction to any stimulus. Studies on the impulsive character in the purchasing of products have been an area of study since 1950s onwards\textsuperscript{128}. To understand the respondent’s purchasing behaviour, an understanding of the concept of impulsive behaviour was required. So how does one define impulsive buying? The definition used in this study was developed by Rook where he explained it as:

"Impulsive buying occurs when a consumer experiences a sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately. The impulse to buy is hedonically complex and may stimulate emotional conflict. Also, impulse buying is prone to occur with diminished regard for its consequences". (Rook 1987, pp: 191)

So the buying impulses in such case are forceful and urgent which often demands instant gratification. There is a certain spontaneity attached to the action and as a result, the effect and the consequence of the behaviour are sudden and fast. Purchasing in this state occurs at a minimum time span. So the feeling of the respondent can be summarized as: "Once I can see it in my mind, it won’t go away until I buy it. If I can see it, that’s it" (Female, 29 years). While shopping or even in the act of browsing, when a consumer comes across an item which catches the eye, his experience is like: "...it stands out from the rest. As soon as you see it, you stop walking and stare at it for few moments before you realize that’s the one!" (Female, 30 years). Respondents have said that during the time of impulsive buying they sometimes tend to lose all rationality of buying the product and take a very instinctive decision. However, sometimes this impulsive buying may be because of the availability of the product at that particular time and place which motivates the buyer. For example, the respondent says: "It felt like something you have

\textsuperscript{128} Studies made by The DuPoint Consumer Behaviour Habitus Studies (1948-1965); by Patrson (1963) cited in Rook (1987) provided the paradigm and defined the concept of ‘impulsive behaviour’.
been looking for a long time had appeared before your eyes, and if you don’t buy it now, you won’t have another chance. It is just the right place and time”. (Female, 25 years) The market places and specially the malls try to create the environment and facilitate the impulsive buying character of the shopper. So whether it is the display and positioning of products, or the effect of lights or the subtle pressure from sales persons; all, in some manner, help in the impulsive purchase of the shoppers. The Pie Chart 5.3 indicates the impulsive buying behaviour of the respondents at the malls.

**Pie Chart 5.3**

![Pie Chart 5.3](image)

Source: Primary data from Interview Conducted by Researcher

In order to have a better understanding of the nature of the consumers who went for impulsive buying, the respondents were divided as per their views on shopping as an activity. The table 5.1.4 below indicates the detailed analysis. According to this, it was seen that for those who regarded shopping as a boring activity, in majority cases they abstained from an impulsive buying decision. The reason may be because they spent very less time in shopping; hence they do not have the time to preview the area before undertaking purchases. Shopping for them is a need-based activity which does not call for much preoccupation. The next category of respondents, for whom shopping was seen as a necessity activity, had a mixed opinion on the issue. Though a majority claimed to going for impulsive shopping ‘sometimes’, there were also quite a number of them who claimed they ‘never’ went for the same.
Table 5.1.4

The table showing respondents engaged in impulsive activity according to the classification of shopping as an activity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMPULSIVE BUYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG RESPONDENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interestingly in the last two categories, there exists a marked difference in opinions among the respondents. So for the respondents, who regard shopping as a pleasure-giving activity, the impulsive buying nature is quite high among them. There is a sweeping majority (83%) that, either frequently or sometimes, go in for the impulsive purchase. In comparison to that there are a negligible number of respondents who said that they ‘never’ go for such kind of purchases. Similar results have been seen for those who view shopping as a leisure activity. Respondents of both these categories seek enjoyment and delight through the act of shopping. As a result, they have the time and energy to engage themselves in this process which gives them the opportunity for impulsive buying. So to sum up the findings in this segment, it can be concluded that there has definitely occurred a change in the perception regarding shopping among the people in Kolkata. This finding again strikes at the prevalent perception where it is believed that people in Kolkata shop for necessities. The rise in the impulsive buying behaviour indicates that people are succumbing to the new culture of consumption, which is based on the philosophy of ‘instant gratification of needs and desires’. The new culture of consumerism has thereby affected the people and has, to a great extent, changed their perception towards consumption as an activity. Shopping centres and, more importantly, the shopping malls have helped in supporting this new change by creating an environment of opulence. They develop an atmosphere of prosperity and portray an impression that ‘other shoppers are ready to buy’, which creates a pressure among the shoppers who in turn review their own
decisions on purchase. To conclude, it would not be wrong to say that there has been a dramatic change in the nature of the consumers in Kolkata towards the new culture of shopping that has come up in recent times. The change that has resulted has several repercussions, which have been perceived in both positive and negative ways. Despite this, one cannot remain oblivious to its huge impact.