CHAPTER SIX
Calcutta, like all other cities, has its own unique features characterised by its own environmental and socio-cultural distinctiveness. Some describe Calcutta as decadent, moribund and naive while others consider it as highly dynamic and pulsating with life to welcome and absorb all shades of humanity with warmth and candour. The conflicting views and opinions decisively need empirical evaluation. A detailed analysis of the Quality of Life would appear to be the most cogent means to undertake such an evaluation. The present investigation empirically assessed the Quality of Life perceived by people in the City of Calcutta.

The term Quality of Life has arisen out of the growing research on social indicators (Campbell, et al. 1976; Andrew and Withey, 1976) and for the most part the measurement of Quality of Life is made by using a variety of indicators. Two types of indicators can generally be differentiated as "objective" and "subjective".

Objective measures are relatively straightforward descriptions of quantitative characteristics of places or people, such as Economic indicators (e.g. average income of people, proportion of under-employment and proportion living below the poverty line), Services and facilities (e.g., medical, educational, cultural, recreational and shopping avenues), Environmental quality (e.g., nature of environmental pollution like noise, air and water pollution, climate and unexploited natural environments) and Social indicators (e.g., nature of social contact between relatives, friends, neighbours, and strangers as well as crime rate, psychopathology and alienation).
Subjective measures tap individuals' perceptions of their own living conditions and their satisfaction with these conditions. In other words, it is the individuals' **perceived Quality of Life** — a sense of "well-being" or a complex, dynamic psychic state composed of the intricate interplay of conscious and sub-conscious as well as emotional and cognitive elements. The core meaning of all the terms such as 'Quality of Life', 'Perceived Life Satisfaction' and 'Sense of Well-being' are all synonymous.

The profile of objective indicators (Table A in Appendix- III for details) indicate that Calcutta city has a total population of 33.1 lakhs with the density of population per square km. being 31,779 with decennial population growth rate (1971-1981) of 4.96% (Census Report, 1981). The data also indicate low level of average income, high levels of under-employment and high proportion of people living below the poverty line - which largely reveal a fairly low economic status of the inhabitants of the city, in general. (Muni Chakravarti, 1991). It is also alarming that one third of the population of Calcutta live in slum and squatter settlements.

According to the District Census Handbook (1986), the availability of facilities and services like medical, educational, cultural and recreational facilities (Table K in Appendix III) seem to be barely meeting everyday needs of the people in Calcutta even if it is not stated as too inadequate.

Ecologically, the absence of land use plan for Calcutta has affected the natural environment adversely. The most striking ones being the lack of adequate open space, parks and greenery. In Calcutta it is about 0.5 acre for every 1000 persons as compared to the international standard of 4.0 acres per 1000 persons (Ghosh, 1991). Again the location of industries within the city's limit has apparently not been regulated by any zoning restriction. Consequently the ambient air quality of Calcutta is being contaminated. According to a report of National Environmental Engineering Research Institute (NEERI), three essential parameters of air quality, viz. suspended particulate matter (SPM), Sulphur dioxide (SO2), Oxides of Nitrogen (NOx) in the Calcutta city
(Table H in Appendix III) far exceed by far the norms set by the Central Pollution Control Board.

However, in spite of the above environmentally degraded condition of the city where millions of poor live in highly dense conditions, it is interesting to note that the social interaction pattern among the neighbours and friends, by and large, have been found to be congenial, (Nandi, 1990). The crime rate in the city core area have not been found higher compared with other major Indian cities like, Delhi, Bombay and Madras. (Table J in Appendix III)

The above findings of objective indicators are indeed indicative that the city of Calcutta falls short of presenting a high profile of itself so far as its inhabitants' Quality of Life is concerned. However, as the present study was chiefly concerned with the subjective indicators, it used a comprehensive appraisal of the respondents' level of life satisfaction with their present life i.e, their perceived Quality of Life through administering properly designed set of standardised questionnaires on a group of representative sample selected from the dwellers of the Calcutta city.

6.1 FINDINGS

The findings are as follows:

- About 25 percent of the inhabitants of the Calcutta City expressed high level of satisfaction with their present life; 58 per cent expressed moderate level of satisfaction and the remaining 17 per cent exhibited poor level of satisfaction. In other words, perceived Quality of Life of 25 per cent is high, of 58 per cent is moderate and of 17 per cent is poor. Such findings of either high or moderate amount of satisfaction in majority of the Calcutta dwellers are reinforced by a recent Calcutta based study (Ghosh, Ghosh and Dasgupta, 1996) where the authors observed that the inhabitants of the city, in general, have expressed
satisfaction on the existing provisions for leisure and cultural activities, shopping facilities and educational opportunities. They also held an average outlook on several other aspects like housing, employment, medical and social care and local government. They did also express their dissatisfaction on environment with special reference to pollution, traffic and local politics.

The said 'high group' also perceived themselves as dynamic, positively oriented, active, satisfying and relaxed. The 'moderate group' designated themselves like the previous one but with a relatively low degree. But the 'poor group' painted an emaciated picture about themselves having the characteristic features of low achievement motivation, variegated and lonely.

Inhabitants of Calcutta belonging to different age groups vary significantly in their perceived Quality of Life. The findings also reveal that the younger and older age groups are more satisfied while the middle age group people have expressed relatively less satisfaction with their present life.

Males and females do not vary significantly in their perceived Quality of Life.

By and large, no significant relationship has been observed between inhabitants' socio-economic status and their perceived Quality of Life. However, the people belonging to lower socio-economic status have been observed to have a marked tendency to achieve higher amount of overall life satisfaction.

A conceptual framework of overall satisfaction with life or perceived Quality of Life has been presented earlier. The framework views satisfaction with life in general as a function of satisfaction with many specific domains of life, including marketing related domains of material possessions and acquisition/consumption of goods and services. The findings indicate strong support for the hypothesis that satisfaction with one's material possessions plays a significant role in determining
how satisfied one is with life in general or in crystallising his/her perceived *Quality of Life*.

In this context it seems relevant to quote, Crikszentmihalyg, Rochberg-Halton (1981), "possessions can be a positive influence in one's life". They found furniture, television, and stereos are people's most treasured possessions because such objects provide relaxation and entertainment. Pride and vanity are clearly seen in conspicuous consumptions (Rassuli and Hollander 1986). Schudson (1984) saw conspicuous consumption as an attempt to enhance status and prestige. Acquisition tendencies are the desire for power, prestige, and other life style characteristics. People avidly desire goods and services that are valued for non-utilitarian reasons, such as status seeking, envy provocation, and novelty seeking (Belk 1988). The anthropologist Schreiden (1974) said, "man is a maximiser of his status and utility in its purest form in social, not material".

Fournier and Richins (1971) compared popular and theoretical notions of materialism and found different justifications for possessions like:

- **Acquisition centrality**: materialists place possession and their acquisition at the centre of their lives.

- **Acquisition as the pursuit of happiness**: possessions are so central to some individuals who view them as essential for their well-being in life.

- **Possessions defined success**: materialists tend to judge their own and other's success by the number and quality of possessions accumulated.

In the present study, similar views were expressed by some respondents, who were in the medium and low level of life satisfaction. But the respondents who were highly satisfied in life were not concerned about material success. In this context, the question seems to be an important one — Is material possession a
positive or negative trait? Generally, arguments are placed that material happiness is not a permanent means of satisfaction. But these may be a desired quality provided one does not get highly involved in acquiring more happiness through a series of acquisition and possession. Happiness in life is apparently created by marketing by way of offering more choices, for its own existence.

The result of the present study is interesting and surprising too, because spiritual life and the development of the self typically are the cornerstones of people's lives in traditional societies like India should have a strong influence on Quality of Life (Wilson, 1967). The strength of the relationship between satisfaction with material possession and Quality of Life or overall life satisfaction strengthens Thorelli's (1986) claim that in developing countries satisfaction of material needs is a pre-requisite to spiritual development because material satisfactions are necessary for survival or maintenance of a certain standard of living. However, the other marketing-related domain of satisfaction with acquisition / consumption was found not to have so much effect on perceived Quality of Life.

Over and above, satisfaction with material possession had a greater effect on perceived Quality of Life for the old people than for the young or middle aged people. The results of the present study reconfirms the views of Sherman and Newmann (1978) that many elderly people seem to derive satisfaction through possessions. This study further found material possessions had a greater affect on perceived Quality of Life for the females than for the males.

Csikszentmihalyi et.al (1981) also examined the issue how materialism is viewed during the life span of people. They chose three generations of members in families and asked them to name their favourite possessions along with the specific significance of the designated possessions. The stated rationale differed between generations. For instance, the younger (teenage group) was fond of
externally visible products that allowed them to do things. In contrast, the middle aged pointed to a variety of objects ranging from furniture to trophies which possibly reminded them of some accomplishment and shared experiences. The older generation found to be most happy with some mementoes, albums and pictures.

Ferby (1978) found that, when people of different age groups were asked to state why people own things, the middle aged group respondents mostly cited the power and status while the same objects convey as the prime motives.

☐ By and large, no significant relationship between self-concept and material possessions of inhabitants has been observed. But it is interesting to note that a significant negative relationship has been observed between material possessions and self-concept in case of the "negative self-concept group".

The value of possessions stems, not only from its ability to exhibit status but more from its ability to project a desired self-image, and identify it within an imagined perfect life (Campbell 1987). Materialists seem to feel successful to the extent that they possess many products and services which are a reflection of their desired external images. While the basic motivation to acquire something is to gain one's mastery over it and identify it as the self-image, the more fundamental aspiration lies in offering the sense of some security.

☐ Another important finding is that individuals' buying motives are not related to their self-concept. But the importance attached to various buying motives while purchasing any durable item, the various groups of respondents exhibit their unique patterns. The respondents with highly perceived Quality of Life emphasized on longevity, after sales service, availability of spares, easy to handle, company/brand name, company image and price. Again the individuals with poorly perceived Quality of Life stressed on status symbol and international brand
while the moderately perceived *Quality of Life* group did not exhibit any specific pattern.

Several researchers (Bem 1967; Grubb and Grathwal 1967; Grubb and Hupp 1968; Dolich 1969, Grubb and Stern 1971) have examined the issue of meanings about self as reflected in one's selection of products and services. Although these studies have used different types of experimental designs, but they invariably found that highly visible consumption makes significant impact on the owners, either directly or indirectly. Inferences about the types of product users have been made with the help of external information about the product in the context of the created image of the same in the users' mind. According to Macracken (1986), the marketing function in the mass production and distribution process have created a brand personality on the meaning of the products it offers. However, the meaning of the same object is continually in flux due to constant change in the external environment, individuals' internal factors (like mood, psychic development, health condition) and cultural factors (influences from current events, economic development etc.). The stream of research on the symbolic meaning of durable objects have found that it changes its connotations with the change in the individual psyche and market conditions (Thorob and Scott 1990).

Lastly, of those domains of life not related to marketing, satisfaction with family life was found to have a significant effect on perceived *Quality of Life*. This finding is consistent with the results from other *Quality of Life* studies conducted in developed countries (Andrews and Withey, 1976) and illustrates the generalizability of the importance of the family in positively affecting *Quality of Life*. Satisfaction with self-development was also an influential domain of life for the Indians. Individuals engage in self-actualisation or development of their talents, capacities, and creative tendencies, just as they develop mechanisms to consistently provide decent food, housing clothing for themselves and their
families. This result, together with findings from other Quality of Life studies in developed countries (Campbell, 1976), shows the development of the self is an important factor in producing overall life satisfaction for all people.

6.2 IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests some interesting implications. A foremost implication is that policymakers in developing countries must recognize that marketing, through its ability to enhance possession of material goods, can contribute significantly to the satisfaction with life of citizens.

The Quality of Life is reflected by person's disposition to "doing", "having" and "becoming". Possessions are all important to know " who we are". People seek, express, confirm and ascertain a sense of being through what they have. In contrast, Marxists propagated the idea that "people should live to work, because happiness is achieved through doing meaningful and properly satisfying work". (Karl Marx, 1931)

The essential satisfaction of acquisition and possession is a perception that, "I am better than others" or "It is to derive the security need". Therefore, people equate Quality of Life with the range of things that one can possess or keep under one's control. This, in other words, shows how an individual with all possessions survive in the social-milieu.

Not deriving full satisfaction through "doing" (work, social relationships) and having (acquiring or possessions) one looks for sustained satisfaction from "within". That is, by proper understanding the intrinsic potentials or mere "being" mode of existence. Oriental philosophers have long advocated the principles of deriving satisfaction from "within". Because all created things perish; desire leads to passion; passion breeds recklessness and saps the peace of mind. Therefore, "true happiness" can be achieved only from the internal potentialities of the individual.
Another implication of this study is that "having", not "acquiring" is what matters to people. Most consumer behaviour research focuses on pre-purchase and actual purchase behaviour, but few models of consumer behaviour include post-purchase variables in their specifications. Inclusion of such variables, where appropriate, can result in more insightful models of consumer behaviour.

The results of this study further suggest that the government should seriously consider programmes that encourage ownership of necessities, such as houses, cars and a few other durable. One way is to make more provision for the long-term payment loans for the underprivileged. Such loans can lead to gains in material comforts and perhaps foster an entrepreneurial spirit among this segment of society.

6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of the present study. Recall that this research study mainly examined the Quality of Life in the city of Calcutta and explored its possible relationship with consumer behaviour.

First, Calcutta, being a large metropolitan city, possesses wide diversity in terms of the economic, social or demographic characteristics. Our sample size was certainly too small compared to Calcutta's population. Though it tried to represent all sections of the society but the size of each group was very meager. Obviously because of time and resource constraints we could not carry out a survey of wider scale. Therefore, a larger sample size and that too, involving a number of research investigators of varied professional background in a well knit multi-disciplinary project is required to carry forward this exercise.

Second, the sample was found to be significantly skewed, (i.e. majority of them were highly educated, belonged to middle and upper income group) compared to general standard of the population in Calcutta. This limits the generalizability of the results.
Third, here the marketing related factors of consumer behaviour included only respondents' judgement while buying any consumer durable. Future research should incorporate more marketing-related variables and specially examine how wider choice, advertising, pricing, service etc. affect Quality of Life.

Finally, the choice of measurement of Quality of Life is yet to be resolved. We have included only the psychological causes of happiness and assumed that the various objective indicators of Quality of Life within a city remains constant at one point in time. It is clear that more research is needed to develop more sophisticated measures of Quality of life. In light of our findings it is felt that a combination of subjective and objective indicators might be considered in future research.