CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION
Chapter I

1.1 Introduction

The present research intends to study the image of the Bengali youth as portrayed in the songs of the Bangla Band i.e. Band music in Bengali language. Band music is one of the variants of popular music. Music like any other popular 'art' form is an embodiment of culture and it is no exception in case of Bangla Bands. These Bands perform solely or mainly in the Bengali language, using modern western principles of music, as claimed by their members. Even the traditional Bengali folk music plays a significant role in its composition. Such a 'fusion' between the east and the west is representative of the composite culture of contemporary urban Bengal. Music has always had a very special relationship to share with youth, who have been and still are the fans of one or the other genre of music. Like popular music in other countries, the Bangla Band music is very popular among Bengali young people who constitute not only its audience but also its performers. A majority of the Bangla Band members are in their youth or started their musical journey when they were young. They assert their status of being 'different' from the adult society through their songs. Youth is not merely the period between 15 to 30 years of age (Oommen 1990) but it is a stage, which bridges the gap between the dependency of childhood and the independence of adulthood. Young people have the potential for a new start. They are idealistic, romantic and always full of energy to create something new. Sometimes they suffer from acute alienation and consequent sense of passive resignation. But this negativity usually does not persist for long. They soon become very critical and even think and act positively for the sake of social reconstruction. According to Daren Garratt youth becomes a social institution with its own specific codes and culture. 'Youth is, therefore, the point where the dominant culture loosens the control of its young, and 'youth culture' is the result' (Garratt 2004: 146). This culture referred to as 'sub culture' translates whatever is going on around them into the music, fashion and behavior they use to identify themselves (Garratt 2004).
Interestingly, for Hebdige, the central feature of subculture is that it is fundamentally incomprehensible, corrupt and deviant. 'Sub' implies 'below average' or 'substandard'. Therefore simply by labeling a group of young people as a sub culture, society infers its negativity or subversive qualities (Garratt, 2004). My search here would be to find out whether this connotation of negativity is applicable to the songs of the Bangla Bands. If it is so, what is the image of the Bengali youth that has been portrayed in these songs that would make it a sub-culture? Today the process of globalization has made culture a commodity, which can be appropriated to generate profit. Popular music, being an integral part of the culture industry has not escaped from this global onslaught of commodification. Therefore one of the aims of the present research would be to understand the interplay between aesthetics and commerce with specific reference to Bangla Band music.

1.2 Social Relevance of the Bangla Band

Just like every cultural item band music is a product of particular social, cultural and political milieu. A quick glimpse into its history in Bengal reveals the same. The origin of Bangla Band music can be traced to the period of 1970s in West Bengal when a group of youth started a band called Moheener Ghoraguli (Moheen's horses). One of the main proponents of the band, Gautam Chattopadhyay was inclined towards leftist ideology which was predominant at that time in West Bengal in the form of Naxalite movement. The group was disbanded soon because this genre of music did not get much acceptance among the common people. It had its own niche audience. The common people were then interested in the 'other worldly' themes of the Bengali film songs made popular by singers like Hemanta Mukhopadhyay, Manna De, Shyamal Mitra, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhonsle et al. Salil Chowdhury's 'modern Bengali songs' became popular which were a shift away from the idealism portrayed in the film songs. The eighties were a period of lull in the realm of Bengali film and music industry. In the meanwhile, satellite
television made its inroad in India. With the privatization of the television channels, the Bengali audience was exposed to the other cultures of India as well as the west. The themes of the songs mostly centered on common people and their struggle for existence in everyday life. In the early nineties, with Kabir Sumon's 'jibonmukhi' songs (songs of everyday/ordinary life) played with a western instrument like guitar, the people became ready to accept this genre of music. Following the footsteps of Sumon were individual singers like Nachiketa, Anjan Dutta, Shilajeet as well as bands like 'Chandrabindoo' (the last letter in the Bengali alphabet), 'Abhilasha' (Desired one), 'Paras Pathar' (Touchstone) and 'Cactus'. Later on, many other bands followed. The beginning of FM in radio was a major contributing factor in the popularity of the songs of Bangla Band. Today Bangla Band music is an integral part of Bengali culture. The songs of bands like Chandrabindoo, Bhoomi (Ground), Cactus, Fossils, Parash Pathar, Shohor (City) and the like are extremely popular among the youth. This becomes evident in the audience profile during the live performances of these bands who, besides performing in the college/university fests, also perform in programmes sponsored by different media houses (like Friends FM, 24 ghanta and BBC). These band members are celebrities appearing on television in different capacities of judges of reality shows, panelists in important discussions, anchors in different programmes, actors in megaserials etc. as well as newspapers and entertainment magazines. They have also entered the arena of play back singing in films, Bengali as well as Hindi. There are also upcoming bands trying to establish their foothold in the music and entertainment industry. Different reality shows on television regarding competition between new bands as well as 'band' formation are sponsored by different corporate companies. It is the popularity of this genre of music that has drawn me to work in this realm of culture. In the process of my work I would also like to explore and understand the social, historical and economic reasons behind the popularity of this genre of music in West Bengal.
1.3 Interdisciplinary relevance

The proposed research has an interdisciplinary orientation. It possibly throws light on youth culture, youth lifestyle, middle class, as well as social change and radicalism (if any) in the Bengali society which make the study sociological. The social history of the band music in Bengal has been probed into. The evolution of the Bangla band songs and the issues involved in it are to be identified in the process. The socio-political condition of West Bengal during the 1970s and its influence (if any) on Bangla band music has also been reviewed in the process. At the same time the impact of the political stability in West Bengal for over thirty years and the contemporary political scenario on this genre of music will be the subject matter of discussion. The political dimension also gets revealed if the politics of band formation and the conflicts between the members are looked into. The psyche of the band members, audience and the consumers of band music have also been explored in the proposed research. Since music is an element of cultural form, the research would also enter into the realm of cultural studies. Due to globalization the music industry has been facing the onslaught of commodification. What is the nature of such commodification in this realm of music has been the scope of the proposed research. Such interplay between aesthetics and commerce brings out the intertwined relationship between economics and culture studies. The proposed research has aimed at doing a comprehensive study of the Bangla Band music as an element of youth subculture. In the process it is also likely to address many relevant issues like youth in contemporary Bengal, alienation, consumerism etc. Though it would be predominantly a work on the Bengali culture but the interpenetration of the global and the local will always be highlighted. It is assumed that an image of the contemporary youth possessing the contradictory elements of progressiveness, radicalism and romanticism can be derived in the process. At one extreme, they are the products of the globalized world where they have made music a source of their livelihood. At the other extreme it still remains to be their passion and a source of their
aesthetic pleasure as well as their way of expressing criticality and their engagement in constructive social changes. How do they balance in spite of being torn in between the binary forces remains the central problematique of this research.

1.4 Objectives

The major objectives of the proposed research would be to explore

- the socio-historical specificity of the emergence of the Bengali band music as part of youth sub culture. Attempt will be made to locate the convergence and divergence points of the western and the Indian situation.

- the social composition of the members of the Bangla Band in terms of their age, gender identity, family background, educational qualification, occupation and income. This work will try to locate the change, if any, of their composition over the years.

- lyrics of the songs of the Bangla Bands. This will help me to understand the variety of the social issues important in the everyday life of the youth and how far are the issues specific to the local context and how much they differ from that of the global situation.

- the nature of performance of the different Bands. Performance would include features like their ways of dressing, body movements, handling of the musical instruments and their different techniques to relate to their audience.

- the characteristic features of the consumers of this genre of music. Their age, education, occupation, income etc. would help me to understand who are the people who buy/listen/watch such music/musical performance and why. I would like to understand the reasons behind its popularity among the youth or the lack of it.

- the interplay between Bangla Band music (culture) and the capitalist
market (economy). A study of the market-responsive strategies adopted by band members and character of the sponsors for musical programmes are important for this purpose.

1.5 Methodology of the research

Methodology of the research implies principles for doing the research. Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying the research problem along with the logic behind them. Why a research has been undertaken, how the research problem has been defined, what data have been collected an what particular method has been adopted, why particular technique of analysing data has been used and a host of similar other questions are usually answered when we talk of research methodology concerning a research problem or study (Kothari 2004, p. 8). In the present section the methodology of the study has been elaborately discussed.

1.5.1 Problem

The present research entitled Exploring Youth: Sociology of the Bangla Bands is mainly an exploration of the phenomenon called youth. How the Bengali youth have been represented through the Bangla Band songs has been the primary focus of the present research. The impact of the Bangla band music on the Bengali youth appears to be one of the central problematic areas of the present research. The research has been primarily of an exploratory nature because it deals with a relatively new phenomenon called Bangla band music. Though primarily exploratory, it also has other elements like description and explanation attached to it, description because it tries to describe the phenomenon of band music from its different aspects like who its producers, the lyrics of the songs and the different themes that have been addressed to in the songs, the nature of performances of the different bands and the interface between music and economy in the process. The description of these
phenomena would bring in its wake critical explanation of this particular aspect of culture and its relationship with youth.

The concept most central to the present research is youth. Youth, it has been kept in mind, is an analytical construct as well as a contested category. It has primarily been taken as an age category though there is no denial of the fact that youth can have various other dimensions. In the present research the biological age of the youth has been an important variable since 'age' has helped to construct the category called youth. Following T.K. Oommen (1990) youth has been defined as the age group from sixteen to thirty. His definition of youth would apply to the people who are mainly college and university goers as well as those who have entered or just entered the job market. From the research it has been found that college and university have been important places where a majority of the bands have formed or have found willing consumers of their music. From the above stated fact it seems evident that Bangla band music probably forms an important medium through which the image of Bengali youth can be constructed.

One of the other important concepts of the present study is Bengali band music. The definition of the 'band music' has been derived from various sources like musicians, audiences as well as band members themselves. According to them the term 'band' implies a sense of 'collectivity'. To be more specific, in a band all the musicians contribute collectively in the process of making music. Band, according to the members also implies a sense of equality when the question of making music arises and while drawing financial resources after each show. This is largely an ideal typical situation though in practice it has been found out that one or two members of the band gain prominence in it. One of the members of a newly established bands stated that all the other members of the band take it for granted that he will take all the responsibilities. Whatever be, in the present research it has been found out that band is a group of predominantly male members who make their own music which is at times original in composition as in the case of bands like Chandrabindoo (the last
letter in the Bengali alphabet), Cactus and Fossils. Some bands do not compose their own songs but collect the songs from rural places. This is true in cases of bands like Dohar (Repeater), sometimes Bhoomi (though they have original compositions) and many others. The language in which the songs are made is Bengali and the context of the songs is Bengali society. This is the sole reason why the bands are called Bangla bands.

1.5.2 Population and Sample

Population in social research implies the complete set of individuals, objects or measurements having some common observable characteristic (Elifson 1997). In other words it is the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected (Bryman, 2004, p. 87). Population can be of two types, namely finite (where a specific number of elements can be enumerated) and infinite (where no complete list of population or sampling frame can be made and it is essentially theoretical in nature). In the present research all the Bangla bands (Bengali bands) will be the existing population. But the nature of the population is predominantly infinite as no complete list of the bands and their members existing in Bengal is available. The consumers (particularly the young college and university going students) of this particular genre of music also constitute an important part of the population. The nature of such a population is infinite as well.

A sample is a subset of the population. It has to be representative of the characteristics of the population. The process by which a sample is made is known as sampling. In the present research the technique of non-probability sampling has been applied as a complete list (sampling frame) of all the bands in West Bengal, their members and consumers have not been available. The names of thirty bands (established and struggling) have been available from various sources like the television and magazines and internet. The narratives of five established bands have been provided in the present study. The above sample has been made applying the principle of judgemental sampling.

As far as the consumers of the band music are concerned, seventy young
respondents in the age group of 18 to 30 years of age have formed the sample. From the profile of the respondents it has been found out that with the exception of two, all the other respondents have been students of college and university in and around Kolkata. The two respondents mentioned have entered the job market. One is an engineer by profession and the other is a teacher in a reputed college in Kolkata.

The songs of the Bangla bands have also been sampled since the exact number of the songs cannot be enumerated. The sample consisted of hundred and eighty songs (selected randomly) of popular bands like Moheener Ghoraguli, Chandrabindoo (the last letter in the English alphabet), Cactus, Shohor (The City), Fossils, Miles and Bhoomi (Ground). This list is not exhaustive and many other bands and their songs remained out of the purview of the present study. But the number of songs had to be delimited for practical purposes.

The key informants have been selected on the principles of snow ball sampling. The criteria for selection of the respondents have been their profession as well as persons who know/knew the band members personally. Media persons, classical musicians, music critics, Bengali film music director of yester years and academicians (who possess knowledge about music) have been interviewed in the course of my research. Care has been taken to include people from diverse fields who would provide a wider perspective to the study.

1.5.3 Data
Data consist of all the information collected in the process of research. The present research has mostly relied on primary data. The data obtained from the interviews of the band members, those obtained from the questionnaires distributed to the consumers of band music and the observations of the live performances of the bands have been primary in nature. Visual data in the nature of photographs of the live performances and advertisements on newspapers and television have been made use of in the process of research.
Programmes of the bands on television also come under this category. Written data have been obtained from the internet and articles on the bands in different magazines. Songs of the bands have also been collected which can be categorized as secondary data.

1.5.4 Data Collection
The empirical part of any research constitutes of data collection techniques that are involved in the research. In the present research a triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative techniques of data collection has been used. Questionnaires have been distributed among the young respondents who are mainly in the age groups of twenties and early thirties. These respondents are the consumers of this particular genre of music. The above mentioned questionnaire consisted of both closed and open ended questions.7 Questionnaire was also constructed to interview the band members. But it was partly structured and partly unstructured. Partially structured questionnaires helped the researcher to shape the questions depending on the previous responses of the members. It would be more appropriate to say that many interviews were in the form of conversational analysis. The band members narrated the instances of the formation of their bands. Conversations were detailed and intensive. Besides the band members, interviews of classical musician, media persons, sound engineers, and singers have been taken. The advantage of having people from diverse fields as key informants is that they have given me insights from different aspects of the problem. The band members and the other respondents have been contacted through gate keepers who have also acted as key respondents. Telephone interviews of some band members have been taken.

Besides the interviews, the live performances of the bands have been attended by the researcher. Herein I have used the participant observation method.8 The venues of most of these performances have been college, university grounds on the occasion of fests and reunion. Some programmes had
been organized in auditoriums like Nazrul Manch on the occasion of Music Festivals organized by Friends' FM. The live performances have been very interesting for me because the audience reactions to this genre of music could be witnessed. Moreover the props used for performances, arrangement for lights and sound, and body language of the performers could be observed. Extensive notes have been kept of these performances. Photographs have been taken of the live performances; in this context the method of visual ethnography has been used. Photographs have helped me to analyse the subtleties of live performances later on during the phase of writing. Besides the live performances, the recorded performances of the bands have acted as important source of data. The recorded performances have been obtained from television programmes on bangla bands and CDs of the bands. A comparison between the live and recorded performances has helped me to understand the differences in strategies of appeal by the band members to their consumers.

Internet has been one of the chief sources of data collection. A survey of the websites of the various bands had been undertaken in order to find out the places where these bands perform or have performed. The websites also contain the brief history of the formation of the bands. To a certain extent the history of the formation of bands has been constructed on the basis of the information available on these websites. Interviews of the band members are also available on the internet. Such interview by the band Chandrabindoo has served a useful purpose for the present research. Interviews of band members in different newspaper supplements, widely circulated magazines like Unish Kuri (Nineteen Twenty) and Parama have been collected. Band members' own articles get published occasionally in magazines and little magazines. Many such articles and columns have been assimilated. Live programmes on newly formed bands on television have been regularly followed. The content analysis of such programmes has helped us to understand the background of this genre of music making. Apart from the interviews, the involvement of the band members in other activities like acting, participation as judges in different
popular reality shows like Mirakkel, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Little Champs (entertainment programmes) etc. and participation in different discussions on social issues on popular Bengali news channels like ABP Ananda (the channel owned by Ananda bazar Patrika, a leading Bengali daily) have been followed. Their appearance in different advertisements like Shalimar Coconut Oil, Nihar Naturals have been kept note of. The data available from the various sources have been collated in order to construct a comprehensive reality on the genre of music named Bangla band.

1.5.5 Analysis of Data

Analyses have been both quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand the attitude of the youth towards this genre of music has been attempted to be measured. With this purpose in mind a survey had been conducted amongst the consumers of this genre of music. The answers provided by the respondents have been quantified and expressed in terms of percentages. On the other hand the research also has a qualitative dimension to it. Attempts have been made to decode (Hall), analyse and interpret the lyrics of the songs of the band (Procter 2004). Photographs of performances on the bands have been analysed. In constructing the reality of band music, the perspective of the band members and the consumers of band music have been kept in mind. The views shared by other musicians and key informants have been analysed. Content analysis has also been made of the articles and other write ups available on bands and their members in newspapers and magazines, internet as well as of television programmes on bands.

1.5.6 Presentation of report

The present research would be organized in the following chapters. Chapter 1 would be on 'Introduction'. In this chapter the background of the research has been stated and the problem has been rooted in the contemporary Bengali society. The chapter also consists of the methodology or the principles
following which the present research has been done. Chapter 2 consists of the existing 'review of literature', examining the theoretical standpoints related to the current study. The third Chapter has been on the social 'history' of the Bangla band music. It is worth mentionable here that the roots of this particular genre of music have been traced in West Bengal though it cannot be denied that our neighbouring country Bangladesh is known to have had a very strong tradition of Bangla Band music. Due to lack of time the scenario of band music in Bangladesh could not be explored in the present research. Chapter 4 would consist of the process of decoding and analyzing the lyrics of Bangla band music. Herein I have tried to understand the nature of the contemporary youth as reflected through some of the songs of band music. The songs have been randomly selected. Chapter 5 examines the nature of 'performances' of the Bangla bands. A study of the live performances is important to unravel the nature of commercialization of band music and in the process would also understand the interface between commerce and aesthetics in today's society. The final chapter on 'conclusion' has winded up the entire research.

1.5.7 Limitations of the research

The present research has several shortcomings. The major problem faced while doing the research has been the lack of co-operation on the part of the respondents. The band members who form one of the core groups of respondents have been too busy to give their interviews. Though they had been showing initial interest in the research but during actual interviews most of them could not give time. The interviews of only a few of them could have been possible. Secondly, in the present research the scenario of bangla band music in Bangladesh has not been considered. It cannot be denied that Bangladesh provides a strong and flourishing ground for bands. But due to lack of available literature the situation of band music in Bangladesh could not be explored in the present research. Thirdly, a complete list of all the bands in West Bengal remained unavailable due to which most of the underground bands have
remained outside the purview of the research. The bands mostly popular and the names of those which have been obtained from the shows on television have been the subject of the current research. In spite of the above mentioned weaknesses, the present research has been done with honesty and sincere effort.

Endnotes

1. Sample can be of two types—probability and non-probability. Probability sample is selected using random selection so that each unit in the population has a chance of being selected. Non-probability sample is one that has not been selected using a random selection method. Essentially, this implies that some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others (Bryman 2004, Social Research Methods p. 87).

2. Non-probability sample are of four types namely convenience sampling, judgemental sampling, quota sampling and snowball sampling (Bryman 2004, Social Research Methods).

3. Purposive or Judgmental sampling generally considers the most common characteristics of the type it is desired to sample, tries to figure out where such individuals can be found, and then tries to study them. A purposive sample is a form of non-probability sample in which subjects selected seem to meet the study's needs (Baker 1999, Doing Social Research p. 138).

4. In Snow ball sampling the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others (ibid., p. 100).

5. While deciding about the method of data collection to be used for the study, the researcher should keep in mind two types of data viz., primary and secondary. The primary data are those which are collected afresh and for the first time, and thus happen to be original in character. The secondary data, on the other hand, are those which have already been collected by someone else and which have already been passed through the statistical process (Kothari, 2004, Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques p.95).

6. There are several methods of collecting primary data. Important ones are observation method, interview method, through questionnaires, through schedules (ibid, p96).

7. Closed-ended questions force the respondents to select a single response from a list. Open-ended questions state a question and leave room for the respondent to write out an answer (Baker, 1999, Doing Social Research p.209).

8. A participant observer immerses himself/herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to conversations both between others and with the fieldworker and asking questions (Bryman 2004, Social Research Methods p. 292).

9. Visual ethnography is an effort to understand culture by making it visible, and the frame of reference is usually much smaller than a whole culture (Harper 2012, Visual Sociology p. 11).