SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

The study was designed to explore mainly the key environmental issues relating to retail trade, the characteristics of Indian consumer market, the background and demographic factors of the retailers, the characteristics of their enterprises, retail trade management practices and also the customers’ expectations from the retail enterprises. An empirical study was carried on based on the data collected from the retail traders and customers of different places (city, town and village) in West Bengal.

The basic notion of the study was that the major outcome of any system is realised by the inter actions of all factors of the sub-systems and not by factors or activities operating in a particular subsystem in isolation. Keeping this notion in mind the researcher analysed the key environment issues relating to the development of retail trade with special reference to Indian retail trade environment. Along with these issues, another related issue is the consumer market where the retailers are to operate. So, the researcher also analysed the characteristics of Indian consumer market.

Retailers are to respond to the economic as well as the social or community needs. Changed attitudes toward consumerism forcing the retailers to do their business in more legal as well as ethical way. Economic development of the country along with the formalised credit plans for consumer durable product purchase improving the market thereby the retailers are being compelled to face the challenges ahead. Retailers are to face the consequences of the technological development both the creation of opportunity and the threat posed. Competition is very keen. Formats are changing in order to cope with the changing environment of retail trade.

Though the characteristics of the local trade area are important to the retailer, no one can deny the need for awareness of the aggregate market situations and trends. A change in the aggregate consumer market affects all the retailers. Indian consumer market is full of
diversity and change. It is a vast market with various characteristics. Geographical and climatic conditions, population, density, birth rates, death rates, education and literacy levels, migrants, income, family structure, expenditure pattern, rural - urban distribution of the population, male - female ratio, social class, caste, religion, language, occupational structure, cultural transformation— all these factors shape the consumer market conditions. All are changing with the change of time. Retailers consider these changes and characteristics while taking any decision for running their organisation in the right path.

7.1 Main findings of the field study

Background and demographic data were discussed to compare differences among the three groups. The researcher also tried to test the associations between the places of retailing and some demographic factors of the sampled retailers. Issues pertaining to management attitude variables were also compared. These attitudes are significant as they influence the work environment and relationship in that environment and ultimately shape the pattern of retail trade management.

7.1.1 Background and demographic factors

This study reveals the personal and demographic characteristics of the respondents. Among CMRs about 25% have Bachelor’s or higher degrees while the corresponding figures for the TMRS and VMRs are 19.8% and 15.2% respectively. The net average monthly incomes of CMRs, TMRs and VMRs are Rs.4,174, Rs. 3,942 and Rs.3,903 respectively. The mean differences of the net income between the CMRs and the TMRs are less significant than between the CMRs and VMRs and also between the TMRs and the VMRs. The differences among the three groups with respect to education and income are not unexpected. With regard to characteristics such as age, religion, marital status, state of origin these three are fairly homogeneous groups.

The study also shows the family background of the respondents. In all the three groups, there has been a Progressive shift, with each generation from agricultural occupation to the business. The family background indicates that for 45% of the TMRs, the father’s ‘Occupation was in the business field whereas only 32% of the grand fathers came from such a background. The figures for the CMRs and the VMRs show a similar trend. However, such
occupational transformation is more marked in the case of the TMRs than of the other two groups.

The respondents (83.7%) of the city market areas were mostly reared up in the City milieu. 80.2 per cent of the town market respondents were reared up in towns and 100 per cent of the village market respondents were reared up in rural milieu. 94.20 per cent of the city market respondents go back to visit the places of origin once a year or more. 76.70 per cent of the town market respondents go back home more than twice a year. 90.7 per cent village market respondent's places of business are their places of origin. The marked differences among the three groups with respect to number of dependents in the family were found significant.

It is observed from the study that 8.5 per cent of the respondents' enterprises were being run for a maximum period of 10 years, 44.2 per cent upto 20 years, 38.7 per cent upto 30 years, 7 per cent upto 40 years and 1.6 percent were being run for a maximum period of 50 years. 89.5 percent of the City retail enterprises were of maximum 30 years old. In village markets, a large number of retail enterprises (73.2%) had been established during the last 20 years. In this study, it has been observed that 50.4 percent of the respondents' retail enterprises are being run in own premises and 49.6 percent of the retail enterprises are being run in rented/lease hold premises. It is also observed that 80.20 percent of the City retail enterprises are being run in rented/lease hold premises, whereas, 86 percent of village retail enterprises are being run in own premises. It is also observed that on an average the floor space area of city town and village retail enterprises are 167.44 Sq.ft., 184.88 Sq.ft. and 215.11 Sq.ft. respectively. They also expressed that the floor space is sufficient for them and they are not facing any problem with the floor space.

The study also shows that about 77.5 percent of the retailers are running their enterprises with the help of one or two employees. 17.1 percent of the respondents are running their enterprises by themselves without employing any hired person. The average salary paid by these City retailers is Rs 575 per month. Town retailers pay on an average Rs 400 per month and average salary paid by the village retailers is Rs 275 per month. In some cases free meal and light refreshment are provided by the retailers.
The study also reveals that 34.1 percent of the respondents have invested up to Rs. 1.5 Lakhs and 21.7 percent have invested in the range of Rs. 1.51 to Rs. 2.5 lakhs and 20.6 percent have invested in the range of Rs. 2.51 to Rs. 3.5 Lakhs on retail enterprises. 13.1 percent of the respondents invested up to Rs. 4.5 lakhs and 10.5 percent have invested up to Rs. 4.5 lakhs and 10.5 percent have invested up to Rs. 5.5 lakhs. The average investment in city, town and village market retailing are Rs. 3.43 lakhs, Rs. 2.77 lakhs and Rs. 1.13 lakhs.

Regarding sales of the retail enterprises, the study reveals that 23.2 percent of the respondents had average sales of Rs. 1000 per day and 34.9 percent of the respondents had average sales of Rs. 2000 per day, 21.7 percent had average sales of Rs. 3000, About sixteen percent had average sales of Rs. 4000 and 4.3 percent of the respondents had average sales of Rs. 5000. The average sales in City, town and village retailers were Rs. 3220, Rs. 2250 and Rs. 1814 per day respectively.

In this study it was observed that 32.6 percent of the respondents earned between Rs. 2000 to 2999, 31 percent between Rs. 3000 to 3999, 21.7 percent between Rs. 4000 to 4999, 9.7 percent between Rs. 5000 to 5999 and 5 percent of the respondents earned between Rs. 6000 to 6999 per month from their retail enterprises. These are the figures of net income earned by the retailers from their trade.

The marked differences among the features of the three groups of respondents enterprises with respect to age of business, floor space, employment, investment sales and income were found statistically significant at 95% level of Confidence. But there is no significant difference among these three groups of retailers with respect to the reasons for entering retailing field. About 90 percent of the respondents stated, the reason for entering retailing field is mainly economic, only about 10 percent stated other reasons but also mentioned ‘economic’ though not main but one of the other reasons.

7.1.2 Responses to Management attitude variables Customer related issues

The study reveals that about half of the respondents rated the feelings about the consumers or behaviour of the consumers as ‘satisfactory or polite. About one third of the respondents the behaviour of the consumers as ‘average’ or ‘in-different’. By and large city market retailers are more satisfied with the behaviour of the consumers than that of their town and village
counter parts. Fastidiousness, hastiness, unending demands for better quality products, rigorous bargaining and delayed payment made by the customers are the main reasons of their dissatisfaction about the consumers.

The retailers try to receive the customers as soon as they arrives in the sales area. Most of the respondents (76.3%) attend the customers at the first chance and they also try to train their employees and assistants to do the same. These attitudes are shown by the retailers-respondents irrespective of the market areas from which they are drawn. Sometimes they fail to attend the customers at the first chance and they also try to train their employees and assistants to do the same. These attitudes are shown by the retailers-respondents irrespective of the market areas from which they are drawn. Sometimes they fail to attend the customers at the first chance when a large number of customers step into the store at a time.

Only 33.7 per cent of the respondents very often provide information to the customers and 60.1 per cent of the respondents stated that they are required to provide information about the product occasionally. Some retailers also candidly confessed that they are not in a position to provide all the information about a product. But about 90 per cent of the respondents admitted that the seller should know a little bit of all the product in order to motivate the customer for making the sale.

7.1.3 Employer-employee/Assistant relationship

The study reveals that about 52 per cent of the respondents rated the relationship with the employees of their organisations as ‘good and very good’, 40.2 per cent of the respondents rated as ‘average’ and 8.4 per cent rated the relationships as ‘bad and very bad’. A half of the respondents are not totally satisfied with their employees. In spite of the fact, they are managing their enterprises with the help of these employees due to non-availability of better ones. The city market retailers are more dissatisfied with their employees in comparison to that of their town and rural counterparts.

About 90 per cent of the respondents consulted with the employees and assistants. About 10 per cent of the respondents do not consult with the employees and assistants and they run their organisations on the basis of their own ideas and views. Most of the employees of the retail trades are not well educated and the employers also do not wish to open the
secrecy of their business, they discourage the process of consultation. They do what they deem fit. The respondents also confessed that the information regarding secrets of purchasing and financial sourcing are not disclosed to the employees. These attitudes were revealed by the retailers irrespective of the market areas. Sometimes assistants’ are views are taken into consideration as the assistants are the family members of the retailers.

Assistance from the family is quite natural requirement while performing any work by a person. The retailers are no exception. Rather the retailers need quite more assistance because of the nature of their works (i.e. long working hours purchasing, decorating the store, cleaning, marking the commodity, special packaging etc.). 81.1 per cent of the respondents opined that they received ‘average’ to ‘very great extent’ type of assistance from their family, otherwise it would not possible for them to run their enterprises as they were running. The type of assistance received by them are different from retailer to retailer. The differences are also statistically significant. The city market retailers receive little assistance from the family in comparison to the town and village retailers. 45 per cent of the village retailer-respondents receive assistance to great extent whereas the city and town market retailer respondents (32.5 and 38.3 per cent) receive assistance to great extent.

It has been observed that 54.2 per cent of the respondents stated the employees assistance received by them as ‘good’ and they help great extent in running their enterprises. 37% of the respondents are not so satisfied with the quality of assistance they received and rated the assistance as ‘average’ and 8.86 per cent of the respondents received very little assistance from their employees. There are marked differences of ratings among the retailer of various areas. City market retailers (17.5%) receive assistance of low extent in comparison to the city market retailers (2.7%) and village market retailers (6.2%).

Supervision is a very important area of business management. Naturally, in case of retailing, it is also true. In this study, half of the respondents supervise their employees and assistants closely. Only 15.5 per cent of the respondents supervised their employees and assistants in a loosely manner. 34 per cent of the respondents make a balanced supervision. They follow neither ‘too close’ nor ‘too loose’ types of supervision. There are no marked differences among the types of supervision in three market areas. Low levels of experience and reliability on the part of the employees might lead to close supervision on them.
7.1.4 Work itself and work involvement

The study clearly indicates that 20.5 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with their work and 33 per cent are not satisfied with the work they are doing. It is significant to note, a large number of respondents, (46.5%) rated their work as "average". Regular overwork is their main concern. There are marked differences of opinion about the work in three different market areas. In city market areas, 31.5 per cent and 29 per cent of the respondents are satisfied and dissatisfied respectively. Whereas in village market areas only 10 per cent are satisfied and about 44 per cent are dissatisfied with their work.

The scope to use one’s abilities in the field of work is of great importance in determining the levels of satisfaction derived from the work. 17.4 per cent of the respondents are in a position to use their abilities in their actual field of work, whereas 52.3 per cent got little scope to use their abilities. There are marked differences of opinion in three different market areas. City market retailers (24.5%) stated that they have enough scope to use their abilities whereas town market retailers (16.2%) and village market retailers (11.6%) have this opportunity. Educated persons in today’s retailing business of small size with small amount of capital are not getting the scope to use their abilities.

It has been observed from the study that about 23 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with their income they earn from their retail enterprises. There are marked differences with respect to the ratings of satisfactory income in three market areas. The levels of dissatisfaction about the income are more or less same CMR (24.5%) TMR (29.1%) and VMR (24.6%) in all the three market areas.

In spite of the low level of satisfaction from the income they receive, A large number of retailers (60.8%) do not want to change their work. Perhaps the freedom of running an enterprise and the love for their own-established enterprises are the driving forces to opine in the same manner irrespective of the market areas in which they actually operate.

7.1.5 Store & merchandise related issues

About 51 per cent of the respondents try to adopt new ideas in the business field. All the three groups can not adopt new ideas in the same way. But almost all of them admitted the need for
introducing new ideas into the operation of business is a necessity to cope with the changing environment otherwise it would be impossible for them to survive in this competitive age.

The study also reveals that 31.6 per cent of the respondents considered, the quality of the merchandise as 'not bad' or 'average', 12.2 per cent of the respondents stated the quality of merchandise as 'very good' and the remaining 56.2 per cent rated the quality of merchandise as 'good'. By and large the respondents are satisfied with the quality of merchandise sold by them.

About 72 per cent of the respondents charge the fixed price for the merchandise sold. Out of these regular fixed price sellers about 24 per cent are from village market. 46.5 per cent of the village market respondents do not follow fixed price selling technique on a regular basis. The respondent, opined that they generally do not charge extra amount seperately in case of credit sales. At the same time, a majority of them (95%) confessed that a cash buyer enjoys the benefit of low price compared to a credit buyer. A credit buyer is always required to pay the price printed on the packet, while some discount is given to a cash buyer. Almost all the respondents have stated that their payment system is good enough for the customer. Because the retailers provide the customers both the options of payment i.e. cash and credit option. All of them provide credit to the customers only when the customers are very known or well acquainted with them. Because in most of the cases credit is given on a non-formal basis. Without any formal agreement credit sale is made on the basis acquaintance, and past good dealings and behaviour of the customers.

Almost all the respondents replace the product when the customers want to return the product for any valid reasons. The retailers also stated that they do not repay cash for the goods returned by the customers. All the three groups responded in the same way. The reason is that once the products are sold, profit earned from that sales enjoyed by them and if they made the provision of cash repayment it may badly affect their financial as well as profit earning capacity. So normally they try to pursue the customers in favour of replacement and in some cases they return money.

This study reveals that 69.4 per cent of the respondents rearrange their merchandise at regular interval in order to make the store attractive and also to save displayed merchandise
from damages done by the fume, dust and heat. There are not market differences in attitudes regarding this re-arrangement of merchandise by the three different groups of retailers.

The shop lifting and employee theft are the real problems faced by the retailers. In this study, 77.7 per cent respondents are more or less satisfied with their security system. The dissatisfaction among all three groups are also almost similar (CMR 20.9%, TMR 22.6% VMR 21.9%) about their stores’ security measures.

Regarding the maintenance of accounts, the Picture is dismal in almost all places of retailing. A very few per cent of the respondents maintain their accounts but almost all of them admitted the need for the maintenance of the same.

The respondents are not equally satisfied with the general performance of their enterprises. There are marked differences with respect to the performances among the groups of retailers. 22.8 per cent of the respondents are satisfied with the performance of their organisation. 52% per cent, respondents rated the performance as ‘average’ and 24.5 per cent are dissatisfied with the performance of their enterprises. The level of satisfaction is higher in city market areas (34.9%) compared to other two groups, town market areas (18.6%) and village market areas (15.1%).

General business environment of retail trade has been considered with marked differences by different retailers of city, town and village market areas. 41.9 per cent of the city market retailers considered the general business environment as satisfactory. The town market retailers (50.0%) also considered as satisfactory but the village market retailers (9.3%) considered the general business environment as satisfactory. 26.8% of the village market retailers are totally unhappy with the general business environment, whereas as the city and town market retailers are not so pessimistic about the general business environment. Overall, 33.7 per cent of all the respondents are optimistic about the business environment. Problems of transport and communication in the merchandise procurement process, financial constraints, low turnover and competition are the reasons behind the gloomy picture portrayed by the village market retailers.

The study also reveals that about 58.5 per cent of the respondents rated the relationship with the suppliers of merchandise as ‘average’ or ‘indifferent’. 11.5 per cent of the respondents rated as ‘bad’ and ‘very bad’ whereas 30 per cent of respondents were
satisfied with the suppliers of merchandise. Regarding sales support provided by the suppliers, the respondents’ ratings vary from market areas to market areas. 46.9 per cent of the respondents receive very little support from their suppliers of merchandise. In village market areas the supporting conditions are very bad. In village market areas, 65.2 per cent of the respondents receive almost nothing from their suppliers as sales support. City market retailers (43.1%) get more support to boost up their sales compared to town market retailers (29%) and village market retailers (9.2%).

Competition is present everywhere irrespective of the market areas. 87.2 per cent of the respondents stated that they are to face competition. New and new enterprises are coming up in their field because of some advantages of this trade. So naturally the degree of competition is also increasing day by day.

It has also been observed that a majority of the respondents (57.4%) are not satisfied with the behaviour of the Govt. Officials, 20.2 per cent of respondents have also complained that the officials force them to pay unauthorised payments at the time of releasing of licences or for any inspection. Village market retailers are less dissatisfied than the city and town market retailers.

The study reveals that 54.6 per cent of the respondents have invested both their own and borrowed funds in the retail enterprises. 35.3% per cent of the respondents invested their own funds and 10.1 per cent have invested borrowed funds in their business. The interest rate on borrowed funds ranges from 12 per cent to 60 per cent per annum. In village market areas, 56.9 per cent invested their own funds and the borrowed funds mainly come from the relatives, friends and also from local private lending parties. A large number of respondents are not satisfied with their sources of capital (CMR (63.1%), TMR (58.5%) and VMR (27.0%).

A majority of the respondents of the village market area stated that they are not facing any problem with the trade unions and politicians. In city and town market area the picture is something different. A large number of respondents of city and town markets (42.7%) and 12%) stated their dissatisfaction with respect to the trade unions respectively.
Regarding maintenance of accounts of the retail enterprises, the respondents stated their inability to record and maintain all kinds transactions and materials due to shortage of staff, time and also lack of knowledge in that field. But all of them confessed the need for maintaining records of money and materials. In this study, only 5.8 per cent of the respondents completely maintain the accounts of money and materials, whereas a large number of respondents (29.1%) do not record anything about their business activities and 65 per cent of the respondents maintain records partially.

7.1.6 Problems of the enterprises

Competition in this study was considered by a large number of respondents (85.6%) as an important problem. 57.4 per cent of the respondents also stated that employee retention is a problem faced by them. High investment was considered another problem by 48.1 per cent respondents. Raising capital, dealings with the administration, family succession and employee theft were also considered as challenges and problems in retail trade management.

7.2 Informative & Comprehensive Customer Service System (ICCSS)

A customer may or may not be a consumer. Similarly, a consumer may or may not be a customer. Retailer is to deal with the customer directly, whether the customer (he or she) consumes or not. But the retailer is to take the consumer’s satisfaction level into confidence in order to make that consumer into customer. The retailer’s target should be to make today’s consumer into tomorrow’s customer. So, having simply a competitive edge over the competitors is not sufficient for survival. The retailer will try to provide service which will bind the customers and also the prospective customers (the actual users) to them. Strategies are required to be taken to ensure loyalty to the products as well as to their enterprises. Loyalty to the product is not sufficient, because it will only help the producer and supplier but the loyalty to the store should be ensured by providing them services through an informative & comprehensive customer service system (ICCSS) The system which will bind the customer to them and to their enterprises.
Informative and comprehensive customer service requires the establishment of good relationships among the main parties concerned as well as the maintenance of the flow of information about four important elements. Availability of the merchandise, affordability of the customers, accessibility to customers and assistance from the suppliers/manufacturer and employees of the organisation.

Only a good relationship among the important actors in the field of retail trade is essential for providing better service—the main objective of retail enterprises management. Availability of merchandise is crucial because non-availability of merchandise means stock out. Stockout creates a cost for the retailer. Affordability means the customers' ability to buy the products for consumption. Accessibility provides savings to the customers in terms of time and money also. Assistance from the suppliers/manufacturer help a lot in providing better service to the retail customers. Similarly, good assistance from the employees of the organisation helps the retailers in reducing the overwork problem and thereby help the retailers to concentrate more in the managerial issues of the enterprises. Lastly, it can be said that the retailers will have to present their enterprises as 'Products'.

7.3 Limitations of the study

At the outset, it is better to record that this study is made in an unorganised sector so the attributes of the sector has caused, to a great extent, hindrance to scientific investigation. Thus the researcher has to depend on the limited responses received from the respondents. Though the respondents are small in absolute sense, and not in terms of representation
because the sampled retailers and their enterprises were taken on the basis of stratified random sampling and virtually they represented the entire population of retail trades of the same varieties.

Secondly, the variables considered for ascertaining the attitudes of the retailers toward their organisational environment may be viewed as another aspect of limitation for this study. One may reasonably question whether or not they cover the entire area of organisational environment of retail trade. There might be other factors yet unexplored but still crucial for the differentiation of results of the study.

Lastly, the secondary data used in the analysis of environment of retail trade and characteristics of the consumer market are of few years back. It is very difficult to procure current data. This problem is faced by almost all the researchers working in the field of social sciences.

7.4 Suggestions:

The following suggestions will go a long way in improving the management of retail trade:

1. The retailers will have to decide what and what not to delegate. Through effective delegation the retailer can ease the job of managing and thereby increase the effectiveness of the organisation and reduce the work load of the retailer.

2. In order to have the results of delegation, the retailer will have to develop committed employee and as a result, employee turnover will be reduced.

3. A trusting, supporting work environment will have to be created for reducing employee theft and shoplifting. Establishment of a familial relationship along with other security system is necessary.

4. Retailers and their employees must have a thorough knowledge about the merchandise they offer as well as their customers' needs. With the help of this knowledge, they can answer customers' queries and suggest products. This also
instills confidence and a sense of competence, which are needed to overcome service problems.

5. Training can help a lot in imparting interpersonal skills for dealing with customers.

6. Interactions with customer on a regular basis is necessary for knowing what the customers actually need and expect.

7. The retailers should try to keep all records of cash, materials and expenditure on a timely and accurate basis so that required information for decision making are available at the right time.

8. The retailers will try to deliver a complete package of customer satisfaction (composed of genuine product, fair price, replacement facility, good behaviour, good store environment, credit facility if possible and other related services) in order to create loyalty to their stores.

9. The retailer should try to project the store as a ‘product’ and for this purpose, rearrangement of merchandise display as well as innovative interior and exterior decoration of the store will have to be done at regular intervals.

10. The retailers will try to procure better quality goods at fair prices and other services from their suppliers of merchandise for passing the same to their own customers in order to deliver better customer service.

11. A balanced inventory level will have to maintained so that in no circumstances, the problem of stock out does not arise and the problem of unnecessary blockade of Capital is avoided. So the retailer should always consider the demand states of the market.

12. “Always honour the customers”- this approach should be followed both in pre and post sales situations.
7.5 CONCLUSION:

- Today, these small retailers are not treated as sinners but the general perceptions about them are not totally in their favour. There is no restriction regarding the entry into this field of business. Individuals irrespective of their socio-economic and religions identity are running their enterprises even with low level of satisfaction.

- There are no significant differences among the three groups of retailers with respect to their personal characteristics (age, sex, religion, marital status, caste, Language spoken, state of origin and experience in the field of retail trade).

- There are marked differences among the three groups of retailers with respect to their socio-economic and social characteristics (education, income, family milieu, size of the family, occupational transformation and their attachment with their places of origin).

- There are also marked differences among the three groups with respect to the features or characteristics of their enterprises.

- In respect to the managerial attitudes, the differences are significant only in some cases, where the issues are totally uncontrollable to the retailers. Apart from those issues, there are no significant differences among the three groups of retailers with respect to their managerial attitudes.

- Though this study has unfolded some interesting findings on retail trade management, there is enough scope of future study entailing different aspects not covered here. Moreover, the study is limited one specially with reference to selected areas in West Bengal, so, wide coverage may unfold many a hidden aspect embedded in the field of retail trade management.