Kolkata, the capital of the Indian state of West- Bengal, is the cultural capital of the Indian and the commercial capital of Eastern Indian. Located in eastern India as the east bank of the Hooghly River, the Kolkata metropolitan area has a population exceeding 15 million, making it the third most populous metropolitan area in India and one of the most populous urban areas in the world.

The name Kolkata and the anglicized name “Calcutta” have their roots is Kolkata, the name of one of the three village (Kalikata, Sutanuti, Gobindapur) in the area before the arrival of the British. The city’s documented history begins with the arrival of the English -East-India Company in 1690, when the company was consolidating it’s trade in the state of Bengal. Although Job Charnock, an administrator with the company was traditionally credited as the founder of this city, some academicians have recently refuted this view. In 2003, in response to public interest litigation, the honorable High Court ruled that there has been no specific founders of this city.

Down the memory lane, since the era of the British imperial, Kolkata has all along been a significant metropolis of India. Even today it has been found that Kolkata is more advanced, developed, and progressive than many other states of India. In all types of facilities centering round education, culture, transport, placement and many others, Kolkata has occupied a leading place. From time immemorial, people from different parts of India have been migrating to Kolkata and the practice still continues. Different studies and researches have revealed that people, particularly from Assam, Bihar, Odissa, Rajasthan and North India migrate to this city and finally settle downs here in search of brighter prospects which they can easily and successfully find here. The view that Kolkata as a city has been successful in itself throughout the ages for prosperous and well-established settlements of the migrants, still attracts many people from far and wide to this metropolis. For this reason, Kolkata is still one of the most sought after and important cities of India.

Kolkata Daksin Loksabha constituency which centers on the southern part of Kolkata is one of the implementation of the order of the Delimitation Commission of the India constituted in 2002,
in respect of the delimitation of constituencies in west-Bengal, the Loksabha (parliamentary) composed of seven legislative assembly segments, of which Ballygunge is an important one.

Ballygunge today, is one of the most exclusive and posh locals of Kolkata. It is flanked by park circus in the north, kasba and the Eastern Railway south suburban line in the east, Dhakuria, Jadavpur and the lakes in the south, and the localities of Bhowanipore and Kalighat in the west. Having quite a vast expanse of its area, Ballygunge comprises of beautiful laid out places like old Ballygunge, Ballygunge circular Road, Gurusaday Dutta Road, Golpark, Kankulia Road, Ballygunge Gardens, Dover lane, Rash Bihari Avenue, Southern Avenue, Merlin park, Queen’s park, sunny park, Ritchie Road, the Lake area adjoining Rabindra Sarobor, Deshapriya park and some areas of Lansdowne Road also named as Sarat Bose Road.

Leafing through the pages of history, it has been discovered that the locality of Ballygunge had been a home to a member of distinguished and eminent personalities of various domains. The Tagore Estate used to have large holdings in the Ballygunge area. Maharaja Suren Tagore’s House on Gurusaday Dutta Road was later brought by the Birlas, and the house has new become the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum. Others like sir K.G.gupta ICS, Gurusaday Dutta ICS (Foundation of the Bratachari Movment—after whom the road was later named), K.K Birla, B.M.Birla, Raja Anadilal Poddar, H.L.Semany and Nawab Farosqui also lived on Gurusodaydutta Road. The Maharaja of Tripura build their Calcutta Town House on Ballygunge Circular Road. Pramathesh Barma, who was the Maharaja of Gouripur (Assam), as well as a famous Bengali film director and actor also lived on Ballygunge Circular Road. So did the Maharajas of Santosh, Brajendra Kishor Roychaudhri, the Zamindar of Gouripur (Bengal), who donated money to the National council, which later became Jadavpur University, industrialist L.N.Thapor, legendary Bengal film actress Suchitra Sen (she still does live here), Sita and Sachin Chaudhuri, the Finance Minister of India, and the Khitans of Khaitan Co., Solicitors.

Although the area now reflects the city’s problems of over-crowding and pollution, Ballygunge remains a sought –after residential area. People are prepared to pay fancy prices to own a place here defying economic logic. This is evident in the fact that the senior company executives and bureaucrats, traditionally known as burra sahibs continue to be housed in the locality. The official
residence of the Chief Justice of Calcutta High Court is in Ballygunge and the area has provided State Chief Ministers and union Cabinet Ministers for the last four decades. The consulates of Belgium, Bhutan, Burkina Faso, Indonesia and Thailand too, are located in Ballygunge.

All these revolutions indicate that Ballygunge today, is one of the most up market localities of Kolkata, with land prices among the highest in the city. Since the 1970s, colonial bungalows and detached houses have been giving place to multi-storied flats. In the 70s and 80s these were largely “cooperative” initiatives for the Bengal middle-class, like “Saptapari”, “Paarijat” “Ananda” “Meghamallar” during the 90s, the developments became increasingly swanky as marble-clad high rises were targeted at the city’s business communities. Finally, the new millennium has condominiums with swimming pools, play grounds, and other facilities for the truly affluent.

Although traffic snarls are still quite common, recent road development undertaken at the old Ballygunge side, RashBihari --- Deshapriya Park and Gariahat have improved the infrastructure in the Ballygunge area to a great extent and facilitate residential accommodation.

The southern part of the locality consists of the Gariahat –Golpark area, renowned for clothes, jewellery and fresh food Market that one can find all varieties of fish through the year, an irresistible food item especially for Bengali residents of Kolkata. A number of established retail brands have also opened shops in this area and shopping malls are seen springing up. The best example of this the Gariahat Mall located near Ballygunge Station. Other places of popular interest include Ice skating Rink, Mukti World Multiplex, Max Mullar Bhavan, Calcutta cricket and Football Club (CC & FC), Rabindra Sarobor, Deshapriya Park, Maddox square, Triangular Park and the like. The locality is also a full of delightful shops with various Bengali and North Indian Confectionaries like Bancharam, Ganguram, Sharma’s, Pastries like Kathleen and Monginis, North Indian and Chinese restaurants like Mirch Masala, Hatari, Kwality, Chinese pavilions, Indus valley etc. Sharma Dhaba and Azad Hind Dhaba on Ballygunge Circular Road are two of the best known Punjabi Dhaba in the City attracting large crowds, especially adolescents from all over the place.
Ballygunge is also noted for several reputed educational institutions of Kolkata. South Point School in Mandiville Garden was once considered to be the largest school in the world. Besides St. Lawrence School, Ballygunge government school, Ballygunge Shiksa Sadan, Lyce, Modern High School for girls, Patha Bhavan High School, Army Public school, Kendriya Vidalaya, Ballygunge Science College, South City College, David Hare Training College are among the best known and esteemed institutions of the city.

The researcher in her intensive study of the South Kolkata Marwari Community has intended to limit the geographical area of her research to the three specific wards of Ballygunge in South Kolkata. The first of them, ward no. 65, lies along the eastern side Ashutosh Chowdhary Avenue and Syed Amir Ali Avenue from Park Circus crossing to Ballygunge Phari. The approximate ethnic distribution of this area, as the researcher laid down in her study comprises of 40% of Bengali Hindus, 40% of Muslims, 10% of Marwaris and 10% of Bihari Hindus. Ward no. 69, the second ward under the researchers focal them of study has Ashutosh Chowdhary Avenue in the east, Sarat Bose Road to the West, Gurusaday Dutta Road to the north and Hazra Road to the south as its boundaries. In this particular ward, the approximate ethnic distribution is comprised of 30% each of Bengali Hindus and Gujrati communities and 20% each of Marwari and Muslim communities. The third and last ward no. 70, covers the area of Hazra, Bhawanipore, Netaji Bhawan. The approximately recorded ethnic distribution of this ward was found to comprise of 40% of Bengali Hindus, 40% of Gujratis, 10% of Bihari Hindus, and the lowest 5% of Punjabi and Marwari Communities.

It is thus evident from the discussion on the geographical expanse and the ethnic distribution of the three wards studied by the researcher that the percentage of Marwari population residing within the area under study is relatively less. Thus, the researcher endeavored to accommodate most the Marwari families settled within these wards in the sample frame of her study, suiting her convenience.

The growth of Marwari in the city of Kolkata has not been a one–day affair but a gradual culmination of process. Since, the time of Mughal period, throughout 16th to 19th centuries, Marwari’s have been moving out of their homeland in Marwar, a region lying in the south
western part of the state of Rajasthan in western India, to different part of undivided India. The first waves of migration occurs when a fairly large number of Marwari’s moved to the eastern parts of India, currently comprising of the states of the West Bengal, Bihar and Odissa.

The community of the Marwaris originally belonged to certain specific pioneers social group, which included Agarwals, Maheshwaris, Oswals, Khandelwals and Parwals. These groups prospered till the beginning of the 19th century because of the caravan routes that crossed the area to reach the parts of Gujrat. But from 1820 onwards, many left their families behind and migrated to Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, which were gaining importance as major trading centre.

The emergence of the Marwaris was more an outcome of an adjustment than struggle. Well-entrenched in banking and up country trade, they expressed into the growing areas of internal trade in Bengal, after their migration to its capital. While they were only a handful in the late 18th century, from the mid 19th century they came to central the crucial inland trade in jute and cotton goods. In the later half of the 19th century, they started making Calcutta their head-quarters and brought many plots of land in Burrabazar, and by the late 19th century, the Marwari’s and other North-Indian traders had established their hold over Burrabazar business. Eventually, they captured the wholesale market in imported cloth, pulses, spices, seeds etc. in the ”great bazaar” of Calcutta, and undertook commission agencies and brokerages. There emerged a strong community of the Birlas, the Kotharis, the Bagris, the Jalans, etc, which was indicated by the foundation of the Marwaris Association in 1898, and the Marwari chamber of commerce in 1901. Thus, the domination of the Marwais was not only because of their business acumen, but also their ability to organize the different groups of their community, first in the form of Marwari panchayat, then in voluntary bodies through informal pressure group activities in response to the taxation and other governmental policies, and finally in trade associations.

The Marwari’s, while somewhat behind other elite classes educationally, more conservative socially, and later entrants into industry than some other trading communities, now play a dominant role in the industry North and East India. The Bengalis are educationally advanced and socially modern and were one of the first groups to enter industry. They might have been expected to play such a role at least in their own homeland in Eastern India but have today
relatively no role in industry at all. This is a result of the different evolutions of the two communities, and at least partially of the advantages which the Marwari’s enjoyed as a community organized for commercial activity.

This contrast is the exact opposite of what most social theorizing on entrepreneurship would lead us to expect. Max Weber in his study of the six world religious, argued that Vallabhacharya, Vaishnavas and Jains were especially unlikely to go into industry; Yet many Marwaris belong to these two religious sects. If one studies the religious backdrop and culture of the Marwaris with profound sincerity and proximity, it will be discovered that consciously or unconsciously, religion and profession have been finely mingled in their social and economics concept thus defying the psychologically determinist view of Weber. The deities the Marwaris primarily worship are symbol of finance or money- mainly Laxmi and Ganesh. It is, therefore, obvious that the Marwaris aim to attain financial prosperity through worship than religion itself. It can thus be inferred that religion brings their social boning and economical flourish closely together. Most of the Marwaris are professionally involved in their family business. Their family, community and profession are thus intertwined; failing which, their financial relations along with the social one can be adversely affected. It is particularly owing to these factors that the joint family system is widely prevalent among the members of this community, as it is considered as a useful institution for mobilizing otherwise scarce factors, such as capital. Even in Kolkata, it has been found out that the members of this community prefer living in a joint family system rather than opting for nuclear family structures.

The interests of the Marwari community are still paramount in the city’s economy. They have endowed the city with temples, schools, colleges, hospitals, auditoriums and various charitable institutions. In recent times, some highly educated Marwari women have also played a considerable part in the city’s intellectual, cultural and philanthropic activities.

As all these indicate, the community has been changing its ethos, swiftly but consciously. Although Burrabazar remains a Marwari strong hold, the most affluent Marwaris started shifting out of here and have clustered in Ballygunge, Saltlake and Alipore. Yet, Marwaris are still held
together by certain deep values and traditions. Their pronounced group loyalty transcends their social communication, food habits and marriage customs.

Keeping in mind all these characteristic traits of the lifestyle of the members of the Marwari community, the researcher is her study is her study has tried to establish her viewpoint with utmost sincerity. Ballygunge, the research’s area of study, has already been discussed earlier in this chapter with specific details of its geographical location in the city of Kolkata, its places of interest, educational institutions, eateries and the like. The researcher, as has been already mentioned, selected three specific wards of this particular locality of South-Kolkata because of the profound number of Marwaris found settled here. Their predominance is net worthy in the fact that places like Haldiram food court and Radha- krisna temple (popularly known as Birla Mandir) have sprung up here to cater their dietary requirements and religious affiliations respectively.

The researcher has tried to find out in his study is whether in spite of being on the top rung of the economic ladder and being closely knitted by the norms of joint family system, are the Marwaris confronted with the problems of ageing solitude and despair later in their lives? To find out the appropriate answer to the said question the researcher employed a structured questionnaire with the aid of which she conducted face-to face interviews of the aged Marwaris. Further details of the procedure of the researcher’s study will be seen in the next chapter.