

## ABSTRACT

The title of my PhD is "*The Corporate Entry into the Jewellery Business and its Socio-Economic Impact on the Life of the Traditional Swarnakars and Jewellery Traders in Siliguri*". Traditional jewellers in Siliguri, commonly known as "*swarnakars*", are basically the gold jewellery makers following their hereditary caste occupation in Siliguri Market, where one can see high concentration of such jewellers in different pockets. The corporate jewellers, namely P C Chandra Jewellers, Tanishq, M P Jewellers (whom I have studied) and, are the big capitalists who run the jewellery trade nationwide with retail outlets in many cities with a centralised administration and hundreds of employees, hierarchically arranged. The study was designed to cover the interrelationships between three categories of jewellers, namely, the traditional *swarnakars*, corporate jewellery houses and the consumers who purchase gold jewelleryes.

The present study is empirical in nature. Data for the study have been collected single-handed through fieldwork conducted on (1) *karigars*, (2) small *swarnakars* who run petty trade, (3) middle-level *swarnakars*, (4) three corporate jewellery outlets in the city namely, P C Chandra Jewellers, Tanishq and M P Jewellers. Besides, I interviewed a large chunk of consumers and a few astrologers who are attached to some of the jewellery traders. I conducted fieldwork between July 2015- August 2018.

The thesis has been arranged in eight chapters including Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter 2 deals with Social and Economic Background of the Traditional *swarnakars*, Chapter 3 is Business Structure and Marketing Strategies of Traditional *swarnakars*, Chapter 4 is The Corporate Jewellery Houses in Siliguri, Chapter 5 is Consumers' Perception in Purchasing Gold Jewellery, Chapter 6 is Impact of Corporate Jewellers on the Life of Traditional *swarnakars* and Chapter 7 is Social Value of Gold Jewellery.

The seminal findings of the study are as follows:

- (1) The jewellery trade, which was the monopoly of *swarnakars*, has now been opened up for traders of any caste or class. This is a typical example of how the traditional caste occupations are being taken away by the non-caste members via market rules. The entry of *karigars* from castes other than *swarnakars* has increased the competition both in labour market and in the trade and this has

threatened the livelihood of the traditional *swarnakars*. The *karigars* and petty jewellery traders, who represented the caste, find it extremely difficult to retain their livelihoods. The members of the younger generation now are shifting to other occupations in the areas of trade and services.

(2) The entry of corporate jewellers in Siliguri jewellery market has also brought uneven competition between the traditional *swarnakars* and the big traders. The corporate jewellers use the principles of McDonaldization to perfection in their trade. They put the principles of predictability, calculability transparency, efficiency, standardization, and control to perfection. Their large-scale production, advertisement techniques, strategies for attracting the consumers, strategies of seduction of the consumers, purity guarantee, modern management techniques, packaging of their products take jewellery market to a world of fantasy. This works perfectly in sustaining the buying spree in consuming modern life and proves to be the key to their business success. The traditional *swarnakars*, on the other hand, are still stuck to their conventional tools and techniques of production and petty trade; they distinctly miss out the modern techniques and glamour of jewellery trade. In this uneven competition, the traditional petty jewellery traders and caste-base small-scale *karigars* finding it difficult to sustain their hereditary livelihood. The middle-level *swarnakars* show greater adaptability to find their own place in the changing jewellery market. For the traditional *swarnakars*, it is a clear case of primitive accumulation and gradual extinction.

(3) The most important finding of the present study is that people attach multiple values to gold and gold jewellery since time antiquity and some of these values are like (i) material or rational value, (ii) religious value, (iii) social value and (iv) aesthetic and ornate value. As Bauman has argued, consumption of valuables endorses social status. Thus, for the consumers, possession of gold ornaments gives a sense of power and status and great psychological satisfaction to the possessors. The modern-day jewellery traders fully understand all these values that people attach to gold and gold jewellery and they package their business to exploit this social-psychological space where the consumers draw an aesthetic pleasure of fashion in buying stylish jewellery having a hallmark

and the name of a branded company. The enlightened, educated section who have enough resources and reasons for investment in gold jewellery, however, are aware of the business strategies and modus operandi of the commodity market, yet they cannot nullify the seductive power of the commodities and consciously or unconsciously give in to the demands of the modern market.

- (4) The study argues that the neo-liberal socio-economic-political order thrives on free market and the ideology of consumer freedom. In this order, Bauman (*Consuming Life* 2007) argues, the focus of social life has shifted from production to consumption, as consumption now is the foundation of the modern society, much of which is unreal (mystical) or fetish.
- (5) The study has explored the relevance of the concepts like primitive accumulation, consumer fetishism, McDonaldization, consumerism in understanding the dynamics of the relationships between the traditional *swarnakars* and the corporate jewellers. The study largely validates the applicability of these concepts in understanding how the neo-liberal market operates in jewellery trade.

  
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