

## Chapter 8

### CONCLUSION

#### I

The neo-liberal socio-economic-political order thrives on free market and the ideology of consumer freedom or consumerism. 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. There is an elaborate arrangement, which is reproduced socially and culturally, to popularise the ideology of consumption and sustain it at the individual and collective levels. People see life and happiness, status and success in terms of the index of consumer freedom. All other activities, e.g., activities relating to production, distribution or service, are reduced to means to this end. The key to the perpetuation of this order is to generate reasons or excuses for relentless consumption and systematically preserve the buying spree among the consumers and to enlarge the size of consumers by appropriating the social and cultural spaces. In an effort to widen the consumer market the neo-liberal political order makes efforts to raise the income level of the middleclass and reduce poverty so that more and more people can join the consumer market and raise the level of their consumption. Much of this consumption is not fundamental or absolutely essential but they are artificially created. Thus, people are ready to neglect more fundamental issues like health or education to find money to run for consumption of items such as ornaments, smart phones, bikes, branded dresses, expensive perfumes, even when they are avoidable. The tradition, social functions, the cultural values, passions and desires, sexuality all these spaces of human life are cultivated and appropriated in order to expand consumerism, which is the lifeline of the neo-liberal order. The neo-liberal market has mastered the art of generating artificial demands by frequent upgradation of technology, models, looks, and by attractive advertisements and packaging of the products. This art of neo-liberal business works on all commodities including gold jewellery.

The present thesis on “The Corporate Entry into the Jewellery Business and its Socio-Economic Impact on the Life of the Traditional Swarnakars and Jewellery Traders in

Siliguri” has been a study on the operation of gold jewellery market in the city of Siliguri and on the interrelationship between different categories of people involved in the trade e.g., the *karigars* (*the jewellery makers*), the traditional caste-based petty jewellery traders, the traditional well-established traders (or the middle-level *swarnakars*, many of whom are from outside the *swarnakar* caste) and the corporate jewellery houses operating in the jewellery market in Siliguri. The study has explored the competition and conflict among these categories of jewellers and how, over time, the traditional jewellers make adjustments to survive in the changing market and changing government regulations. This is a narrative about uneven competition and the extinction of a section of powerless and stubborn *karigars* and petty traders, who are stuck to tradition and constrained by lack of capital and technology or modern business acumen, and the thriving of the corporate jewellers, on the other. In the middle of the two poles, there are the middle-level traditional *swarnakars*, who with their capital and greater adaptive power (like knowledge of the government rules, education and better management skills), and will to modernize and change, manage to survive and even prosper in the changing volatile jewellery market of the fast-growing city of Siliguri. It is a tale of how the traditional *swarnakar* caste occupation is becoming redundant in modern time and how the younger members of families of the traditional *karigars*, unable to survive in the changing market, are looking for alternative livelihoods outside their caste occupation and family business. The study also tells the story of the fall in the quality of life of the *karigars* and petty traders, who had once enjoyed a good life but are now finding it hard to adjust with the changing rules of the trade. The study also talks of how the corporate jewellers deploy well-researched and astute business strategies to attract burgeoning middle- and upper-class consumers by exploiting the beliefs, traditions, habits, social obligations, rituals and the world of fantasy of the consumers and thus promote their business.

## II

The study was designed to cover the interrelationship in the market place between three categories of people that control the jewellery market in Siliguri, namely, the traditional

*swarnakars*, corporate jewellery houses and the consumers who purchase gold jewellery. The areas of enquiry were: (1) to study the social and economic background of the traditional *swarnakars* (small and medium *swarnakars*) and the *karigars*, (2) to classify the *swarnakars* on the basis of caste, period of business, nature of business (production), contribution of family labour and marketing, etc., (3) to study the production relations among the owners and the labourers in the production units and jewellery shops, (4) to study the changing marketing strategies of the traditional *swarnakars* (small and medium) over time, (5) to study the entry of the corporate sector in jewellery trade in Siliguri and the factors underpinning the sector's growth, (6) to study the structure of corporate business in jewellery—the network between the production units and marketing outlets and the way the corporate traders fetishise and promote the ornaments (through advertisements) and promote business by maintaining a network of relations with the customer, (7) to study the seasonality in jewellery demand of both the traditional and corporate sectors and how they change their business strategies with changing seasons, (8) to study the differential background (social or class background) of the customers of corporate traders and petty traders, (9) to study how social values attached to gold ornaments are changing over time, (10) to study the area of competition among the corporate houses doing the same trade and the socio-economic impact on the traditional *swarnakars* (small and medium jewellers), (11) to study the impact of the changing legislations and government policies on the jewellery trade, and (12) to study the way the small and medium *swarnakars* respond to the changing market situation.

These are all descriptive objectives almost spelling out the coverage of the present study. I am happy that all these objectives of the study have been given adequate attention in the chapters that followed the introductory chapter.

### III

The present study is empirical in nature. Data for the study have been collected single-handed through fieldwork conducted on (1) traditional *karigars*, (2) caste-based *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. I collected information from 102 traditional *swarnakars* (including the shop owners and *karigars*) from four different areas in Siliguri. I applied the purposive sampling method for selecting my informants and interviewed them extensively. The second group of respondents in my study were the corporate jewellery outlets in Siliguri. I had selected three retail outlets of P C Chandra Jewellers, Tanishq and M P Jewellers. The third group of respondents were the consumers who purchase jewellery from traditional *swarnakars* and corporate jewellery outlets. I have used snowball sampling methods to select the consumers since they are floating and not concentrated at a particular place.

I also have done case studies of the *swarnakars* and jewellers who have been badly affected by the entry of big business houses. Besides, I have followed the news items and articles published in local newspapers and on websites. In my fieldwork, I have examined the business strategies (advertisement, offers, networking, exploration of the cultural symbols and strategies to sustain the buying mood by harping on the ‘fetish’ side of the commodity, playing with the purity game, and so on) and the marketing strategies) to understand the unrealistic symbols that has created an impact on the consumer. In studying the changing life of the traditional *swarnakars*, I have tried to examine the nature and functioning of the capitalist market and its linkages with the local market. Finally, I have collected information about the four associations of the jewellery traders in Siliguri that how these associations work to protect the interests of the traditional *swarnakars* in Siliguri. For collecting information about the four associations, I have interviewed the presidents of the associations at the time of National Strike 2016, and conducted focus group interview of the small traders to gather the information about the strikes and national policies. I have collected information from those traditional *swarnakars* who had gathered for demonstrations on a number of occasions.

#### IV

The first major finding of the study is that the gold jewellery making and trading is no more the monopoly of the traditional caste of *swarnakar*; it has now been opened to the members of all castes and communities. It is just about learning the craft of working on gold and executing it; anybody interested can do it. Caste is no more the qualification for getting entry into this trade. Traditionally, the craft was the monopoly of the *swarnakas* and the technology of making gold jewellery travelled from one generation to the other. The members of the younger generation used to learn it from the elderly members of the family and practice it. The livelihood of the *swarnakars* was never seriously threatened since there always used to be patrons and buyers who used to develop a relationship of trust with some fixed *swarnakars*. These relations continued for generations since the consumers, constantly driven by a fear of being cheated by unknown *karigars*, were reluctant to change their trusted *karigars*. This unfailing trust on the *karigars* was, by no means, a guarantee to a fair deal. The patron-client relationship was endorsed by the traditional Hindu caste order, although the patrons traditionally represented multiple castes. The modern market only partially keeps these traditional caste-based stable relations. With the coming up of consumer freedom and so many options the consumers now try out alternative modes of purchasing gold jewellery. 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.

Under the pressure of the forces of modernization built by increasing rationalization of city life and the ever-changing market rules the traditional values and relations based on caste system are clearly loosening. The private capital under the liberalized order penetrates into the so-called traditional terrains of production activities, which were so long reserved for hereditary Hindu caste system, with bulldozing power, to impact the life and livelihoods of the impoverished castes, tribes and communities. The corporate jewellery houses thus enjoy a free run to explore the business opportunities, so long

controlled by the *swarnakars*. Big capital just does not care for any caste prohibition or rigidity. Even a cursory look at how the modern market functions would reveal that under the protection of the neo-liberal or free market regime the big capital in aggressively penetrating into even the pettiest of business opportunities, thus putting the livelihoods of the millions of craftsmen and petty traders at risk. Everything now is packaged by the big companies and sold in retail shops. The jewellery trade which was the monopoly of the small craftsmen called *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. Not only the *swarnakars* but many other traditional castes have seen how their caste-based occupations are being encroached upon by the members of other castes and communities.

The present study has found that the consumers who were attached to *karigars* and petty traders are now shifting to the middle-level and big traders. My study has clearly found this as an ever-growing trend. The glamour and the grandeur of the big business, their massive investment and display, attractive customer friendly packages, their grand and expensive advertisements using billboards, and all means of mass media using attractive models, their shrewd business strategies, their ability to guarantee purity and weight, their ability to go with the taste and cultural festivities, their outreach initiatives, trained salespersons and managers are good enough to outshine the tame and almost invisible petty and traditional *swarnakars* working with small capital in the otherwise dirty and congested corners of the old city.

It looks like a clear case of primitive accumulation leading to estrangement of the craftsmen and petty traders. Marx, in *Capital Vol 1*, has given an elaborate account of primitive accumulation. This is based on an empirical observation about the changing modes of production and class relations that happened in the early phase of shaping of modern capitalism. Marx had observed that the entry of big (both manufacturing and business capital) in large-scale production and trade led to the extinction of the craftsmen and petty traders who could not compete with the grand power of big capital. The craftsmen and small traders, in this process, got estranged or alienated from their own labour, skill, sense of ownership and pride. They got transformed from owner to

labour. They had to forfeit the right to keep control over the value they produce through their hard labour and skill. This is precisely what has happened to a large section of the *karigars* and petty caste-based *swarnakars* in Siliguri market over the last three decades of liberalization. Unable to compete with the corporate jewellery houses they have shut down their business and have taken up paid jobs, many in the jewellery outlets owned by middle level *swarnakars*, and many in the factories run by the corporate jewellery houses, and many had to look for other employment opportunities in the urban informal sector.

One can see an unequal competition between two modes of production, one pre-capitalist and other, capitalist. The small traders, whom I have called *karigars*, operate on what can be termed as “pre-capitalist” mode of production. The *karigars* ran their small shops all by themselves, sometimes with family labour or one or two informally appointed apprentices or hired labour. Using Marxist terminology, they can be called petty-bourgeois or artisans. They maintain close personal relations with their workers and treat them as extended family members, often asking them to do works unrelated to the shop. Being part of informal economy, the owners can evade all provisions of labour laws and government regulations, even the rules relating to minimum wage or job security, tax laws, and labour laws. They fix their own working hours and terms for the workers. The workers are often drawn from among the known circles, kinsmen or from the same locality. They do not need any formal education; they only need the will to learn the skill of making jewellery, using the conventional tools, technology and the art of mixing metals. Sometimes, these relations are life-long but often temporary. After learning the craft and business many *karigars* end up having their own shops in course of time. The life of the *karigars*, until then, is full of hard work, exploitation and poverty; they work with health hazards and after working for years they pick up skin disease, lung disease and lose eyesight at least partially. The wages being low they have a tough time maintaining their own family. The elevation of status from *karigar* to owner meant a lot; elevation of status from an insignificant worker to owner, and an elevation in the quality of life as well. After being used to a decent life for generations and having enjoyed a status in society as *swarnakar*, which had a lot of ramifications for their family and social life, the small *swarnakars* now experience a downward mobility and even a real possibility of extinction as a traditional occupational group.

While the traditional *swarnakars*, especially the small *karigars* are stuck to their conventional business policy, which is unquestionably outdated, the corporate jewellers use the principles of McDonaldization to perfection. They put the principles of predictability, calculability transparency, efficiency, standardization, and control to perfection. They operate as a part of a centralized structure that functions like machine; one can see how perfectly the Weberian rationality has been put to business administration. The rules are centrally decided, the jewellery items are designed and manufactured centrally and then distributed to a wide network of the retail showrooms through perfectly designed distribution channels with highest degree of professionalism, every single transaction is done on in total conformity with the GST regulations, the outlets are run by qualifies and trained managers and sales girls, the showrooms are perfectly designed to attract customers with enough sitting arrangement, free coffee/tea, and the entire showroom is put under strict CCTV surveillance. All worries of the customers are addressed, like purity assurance, fixed price, perfect weighing, transparent exchange of old ornaments, alteration and exchange and so on. Occasional gifts, discounts and monthly EMI schemes – all are designed for customer satisfaction. On top of this, there is policy of giving bonus points are can be redeemed at the time of any fresh purchase. An absolute control over all the staff members and customer attendance make everything move to the complete satisfaction of the management. The focus on efficiency and transparency are used as means to customer satisfaction. They maintain this with customers in their post-sale dealings as well. Complete professional dealings with a bit of personal touch convince the customers to visit their showrooms again and again. With their EMI schemes and bonuses the corporate jewellers can bind the customers with their brand. Since the customers deposit money throughout the years buying of jewellery becomes compulsive.

The use of modern sophisticate machines in production by the corporate jewellers facilitates mass production is a short time thus keeping the production cost to a minimum. With mechanization they can also experiment on wide range of innovative designs with a touch of modernity. They have a team of skilful and well-trained designers to come up with new and changing taste of the customers. The accumulated big data on nationwide and regional sale trends help them continue with some of the

designs while discarding some other designs. The new designs when displayed in showrooms and displayed in attractive advertisements works on the psyche of the potential consumers. The jewellery designs decorated on the body of the beautiful models leave a seduction effect on the young consumers, who then are under some psychological compulsion to buy those jewellery items. The corporate with their jewellery items thus can create a world of fantasy, which has an alienating impact on the young and well-off consumers. Those of the lower classes are not free of the impact of this world of fantasy; they, however, do not have the money to realise their dream of having those coveted commodities, thus, they perhaps live with some frustrations.

The traditional *swarnakars*, who work with traditional tools and go by small-scale production (based on orders from the limited customers, often from the known circles) cannot match the efficiency of the production units of the corporate jewellers. They work in unhealthy small shops-cum-workshops, working on conventional designs, with small gold-stock and capital, without much innovation. Their customers mostly belong to lower-middleclass and middleclass, who have kept themselves free of the world of fantasy created by the corporate jewellers. They base their business on social network, which has been developed over the years, sometimes, over generations. The trust of the consumers is based on this known relationship. The consumers of the small *karigars* buy jewellery mostly on social occasions, like *annaprasan.*, marriage, and so on, or come for small gifts to be given on social occasions. They also visit small shops for alteration and exchange. Thus, their demands are small and largely need-based and outside the world of fantasy. But the small *karigars* are surely losing a section of their customers, particularly those of younger generation who are well off and informed and fashion-conscious, to middle-level jewellers and the corporate jewellers. The sections on the consumers has confirmed this. The small-scale returns out of their business always keeps them short-of-funds to purchase raw gold or to modernise or mechanize their production. The conventional method is labour intensive and, in essence, generates low profit. Much of the money they earn is spent in sustaining their families, in meeting basic needs. What they can expect is impoverished or lower middle-class living.

The middle-level *swarnakars* have withstood the onslaught of the corporate jewellery houses. They have not only managed to retain but have expanded their business even in recent years. They have modernised their business to some extent, and used their

surplus to replicate some of the business strategies of the corporate jewellery houses. First, they have given their retail showrooms a modern and glamorous look with expensive shining glass fits, CCTV cameras, dressed up salespersons and managers. Secondly, they go for advertisement of their show rooms by putting up hoardings and by displaying attractive advertisements in the newspapers, radio and local television channels. They have gone for outsourcing in production; they now purchase readymade jewellery parts from larger factories, and assemble them in their local workshops. Thirdly, they shrewdly use the space left vacant by the extinct small *karigars*. Since a significant section of the consumers are still not comfortable in visiting the glamorous corporate jewellery outlets (since they feel out of place there) the middle-level jewellers make all efforts to make them comfortable and satisfy their psyche. Fourth, since they are educated and have some management experience, they have acquainted themselves well with the GST regulation and other trade rules enacted by the government in recent times; they know how to up keep their business files and manipulate records when necessary. Finally, like the corporate jewellery houses, they also offer discounts and packages on festivals and social occasions. On the whole, I have found in the present study that the middle-level jewellers with their greater adaptive power have adjusted well with the changing jewellery market in Siliguri.

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 (1) material or rational value, (2) religious value, (3) social value and (4) aesthetic and ornate value. I have elaborated this finding in chapter 7 in details. I would repeat the key observations of how the people in general and the consumers in particular value gold and gold jewellery.

Earlier, when banking system was absent and there was no money market, people in general and the rich people in particular used to invest their surplus money in gold. They took stored jewellery as the saviour at crisis time. They mastered tricks in hiding their store of jewellery in safe places. The exchange of gold ornaments in marriage and gifting of gold ornaments in social functions was at the same time the source of security and status. The tradition is present even today; the amount of exchange of gold ornaments, however, varies depending on class positions and statuses of the people involved in exchange. Even today, one of the reasons for which people buy gold

jewellery is their material value and crisis-time security; they can arrange cash in quick time either by selling or mortgaging a part of their jewellery. Even today, when the share market is down people invest their money in gold with the hope of getting higher returns. This is precisely the reason why gold price goes up when the share market dips.

For the Hindus in particular gold always held religious value. Look at all the Gods and Goddesses, how completely decorated they are. The mythical religious characters have set the standards. The Hindus have a long tradition of decorating the idols with ornaments of all kinds, primarily made of gold or of gold colour metals, when pure gold jewellery cannot be used. The Hindus also have the tradition of buying gold jewellery on the occasions of some special pujas, especially on the days of *Akshay Tithiya*, *Polia Baishak*, Ganesh puja, Kali puja (DHANTERAS), Laxmi puja and on the first day of Bengali year. They widely believe that purchase of gold jewellery on these auspicious days will bring them good fortune. The corporate houses understand these sentiments of the consumers and package their sale according to Hindu festival calendar.

Use of different kinds stones in gold jewellery carries special astrological value. People carrying such values visit the astrologers attached to some of the middle level and big jewellery outlets and use ornaments, especially rings with different kinds of stones, according to prescriptions. The people who are troubled in their personal life are the most likely customers. The jewellery traders and the astrologers combine make good business out of this belief system of the people.

Gold jewellery have not only been the symbol of riches and economic stability, they also have been the symbols of social status and power, since olden times. As Bauman has argued, consumption of valuables endorses social status. Possession of gold ornaments gives a sense of power and status and great psychological satisfaction to the possessors; the ornaments also have big demonstration effect. The women in particular demonstrate their status by wearing heavy and valuable gold jewellery on social occasions. They also are in the habit of talking about their possessions in social interactions in social circles. The husbands demonstrate their masculinity by gifting valuable gold ornaments of corporate brands to their wives on birthdays and marriage anniversaries. The women also reciprocate by demonstrating their femininity by wearing those ornaments on important social functions. Even for the poor and lower

middleclass people, gold ornaments are major consideration in dowry negotiations, both in rural and urban Bengal.

Gold jewellery has always been adored as the artifacts to decorate and beautify the body of the women. This has strong endorsement in the Hindu cultural tradition, everywhere in India. An ideal bride in the upper or middleclass Hindu families are fully decorated with bridal jewellery in a bridal saree. One can see that there is a typical image of an ideal bride in Hindu culture which has to be adhered to because it is there in collective perception and is fully culturally endorsed. Apart from conforming to cultural expectations with her ideal looks, the bride has to look sensuous and sexy, especially for the husband. The gold ornaments have an indispensable function here. The cultural tradition, sexuality, aesthetics – all are juxtaposed in these perceptions and practice. The average Hindu families prepare over a long period for arranging all the ornaments that are needed to decorate a bride and meet the cultural standard. In the lower middleclass families or families ridden with poverty the parents dispose of their landed property or other assets to meet this social expectation.

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. The present study has found out that the corporate jewellers put in much research in working out their strategies to exploit this cultural space for promotion of their business. They have all the means to put their strategies to perfection. Since the combination of values attached to gold jewellery is permanent the jewellery traders find a stable and ever-growing space for their business. The corporate jewellers, through attractive advertisements, succeed in provoking the buying spree in the consumers. This applies not only to gold jewellery but also to all modern gadgets and commodities. The modern capitalism, in the neo-liberal order, thrives by sustaining buying mood in the consumers. Much of this buying is in response to the compulsions artificially created by the culture and provoked by the advertisements that work on the psyche of the buyers. The brand names add extra value, which could often be unreal, to the ornaments. In this trajectory of gold-jewellery trade in the modern market the traditional *swarnakars* fail to find a place, hence they perish. The middle level *swarnakars*, however, prepare well to exploit the social and cultural space that gold jewellery hold; they prepare well

to exploit the seasonal hypes in gold jewellery demands along the sentiments of the common people.

## V

In the conceptual framework in the introductory chapter, I had proposed to use some concepts in explaining/understanding the problem under study. I had mentioned about the Marxian concepts of primitive accumulation, alienation and commodity fetishism. I have amply demonstrated in the earlier chapters and in conclusion (so far) how valuable these concepts are in understanding the problem of present study. I have explained how the traditional *karigars* and petty *swarnakars* have lost their livelihoods while being unable to compete with the big capital (the corporate jewellers in the present case). However, unlike Marx's prognosis, the *karigars* and the petty jewellery traders are not absorbed in capitalist manufacturing as labourers for extraction of surplus value. Rather, a large section of those who lose their traditional caste occupation mostly find self-employment in the burgeoning informal sector of urban economy, where they do not need much skill, education or capital. Only a few of their younger members, who receive formal education, find entry into the formal economy and elevate the quality of their life substantially. Else, most of them, bereft of formal education, work hard for a living.

The traditional *karigars* and petty jewellery traders who close down their shops and take up paid jobs in the shops of middle level jewellery traders or in the factories of corporate jewellers go through a process of alienation in Marxist sense. They sell their labour power producing services or commodities for their owners, thus producing surplus value. The mechanization of the production units, the complex division of labour that are found in the big shops and production units also lead to alienation. On top of this, the *karigars* and small *swarnakars* have lost their hereditary caste-based occupation for which they nursed a great of pride. Losing their caste occupation and stable income many of the traditional *karigars* now plunge into abject poverty and struggle for a decent life.

The other Marxist concept called commodity fetishism was found even more applicable in the present study. I have shown in chapters 5 and 7 how the corporate jewellers appropriate social, religious, sensuous and psychological values attached to gold and gold jewellery in order to create an aura around the branded jewellery. The social and cultural values and even the astrological beliefs are fully exploited to add an unreal value (fetish) to the gold jewellery. The beliefs like – purchase of gold jewellery on auspicious days will bring good fortune, or wearing stones with gold rings will rid the wearer of the bad things that would otherwise have happened in life sustain jewellery as fetish. The attractive advertisements and promotion of aesthetics of a kind are also a part of the process of commodity fetishism, which, in turn, promote consumerism on which the neo-liberal market thrives.

The Marxist thesis of consumer fetishism finds elaboration in the writings of later Marxists. For example, Morrison (2006) finds a link between consumption and social prestige and Veblen talks about conspicuous consumption (Veblen 2005). Sigmund Freud, like Marx, used the term *fetishism* in an essay published in 1927, where he explained it as a sexual obsession with the part of the body or an object, which is attached the body. He argued that it is common for people to fetishize object because it is determined by an experience to build in “a symbolic connection of thoughts” attached with an object, which will bring pleasure to the person (Dant 1996). Again, in his essay on *The Sexual Aberrations from Three Essays on Sexuality* Freud defined fetishism as “those in which the normal sexual object is replaced by another which bear some relations to it, but is entirely unsuited to serve the normal sexual aim” (Mayfair 2016).

Writings on fashion, George Simmel argues that fashion satisfies the individual desires for “social adaptation”, which teaches how individuals become a part of homogeneous culture in the modern diversified society on the one hand, and on the other hand, it formulates a class distinction where the upper-middle-class and the rich easily fall into the trap because of their affluence where earning money is not a problem but spending is a problem. Ultimately Simmel’s fashion and Theodor Adorno’s concept of pseudo-individualism (Joseph 2005: 214-215) embody an idea that the consumers draw an aesthetic pleasure of fashion in buying stylish jewellery having a hallmark and the name

of a branded company. To Adorno, popular culture gives a free choice to the individuals in the consumer market. He observed that popular music compelled them to listen to music. It creates an illusion to the listener where they are “unaware of the formulaic approach to music... means endowing cultural mass production with a halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself” (Adorno 1991; Darbyshire 2003).

Zygmunt Bauman (1999, 2007) argues that modern society is fast moving towards a consumer-oriented society, where levels of consumption define the social categories and their relations. In a globalized world production of the corporate world is no more organized at one place, it is rather scattered in different units and therefore invisible. The focus has now shifted to consumption, which is rooted in the neo-liberal order, which thrives by promoting consumption; the society is now stratified in terms of levels of consumption. The consumer market thrives by appropriating cultural values and beliefs and by continually seducing the consumers by creating unreal dreams and fantasies. The world of gold jewellery operated by reproducing new fantasies and dreams. To quote Bauman “But in order to do so, it needs customers who want to be seduced ... They live from attraction to attraction, from temptation to temptation- each attraction and each temptation being somewhat different and perhaps stronger than its predecessors” (Bauman 1999:38).

The present study finds relevance of all these concepts in order to interpret the modus operandi of the jewellery market in a city like Siliguri and the interrelationship between different categories of players who are involved in the business. The interrelations between different categories of traders are changing with changing rules of market. The three different categories are differentially placed in a hierarchy and engaged in conflicts of interest. The forces that can pull the resources better and can appropriate the cultural or symbolic elements better in their business strategies thrive while those who cannot do that perish.

One can question whether the consumers are bereft of agency and are completely ignorant about the deductive ploys of the shrewd businessmen. The answer to this cannot be a simple “yes” or “no”. There could be consumers’ particular of the lower

and lower middle classes who do not control much surplus to buy gold jewellery unless it is unavoidable do not put much effort to decipher the sophisticated business strategies; their focus is on purity and design that fit their tradition. 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 unconsciously or consciously give in to the demands of the modern market.