

Shopping Mall Culture and the Changing Urban Space – A Case Study of Asansol Municipal Corporation

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Abstract – With India's growing per capita income the lifestyles are also changing in a rapid way. After primary and secondary economic activities, the economic growth engine of the country is now in the hands of retail sector, which changes its landscape into a bigger form contains everything under one roof – shopping mall. This transformation of Indian retail sector has successful evidents in metropolitan cities as well as small towns. This paper tries to understand the changes in urban spaces due to this new retail transformation on Asansol Municipal Corporation of Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. The present study is based on primary as well as secondary sources of data. The results have explained both in quantitative and qualitative methods. The study reveals that consumers are now becoming more brand conscious, comfort seeking and quality biased, at the same time they want to save their time. As a growing industrial urban center, Asansol is evolving with the new retail trend, as a result the urban space is changing and people attract more towards this new trend- Shopping Mall Culture.

Keywords: Shopping Malls, Consumers, Urban Center.

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INTRODUCTION

The word 'retail' originates from a French-Italian word 'Retailer' which means to break bulk. 'Retailing is the set of activities that market products or services to final for their own personal or household use' (Dwivedi, 2010). It is an important component of urban economic activity reflects the level of development of an urban area. Retail trade activities are essentially customer oriented. The structure of this trade reflects the socio economic status of consumers.

'The Geography of urban retailing has been studied from the main two perspectives; from a cultural perspective, retailing is viewed as a particular form of consumption while from an economic perspective: it is focused on the physical construction of retailing environment.' (Robertson, 1995)

The Indian retail industry has evolved as one of the most dynamic and fastest growing industries. It accounts for over 10 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Products (GDP) and around 8 percent of the employment. India is the fifth-largest global destination for retail trade. 'India has witnessed a revolution in the last two decades owing to rapid urbanisation and changing consumption' (Dwivedi, 2010). The entry of the leading corporate houses in to retail created a surge in to the growth of the

industry. The term shopping mall is essentially related to the new mode of economy that is globalization. Globalisation and shopping mall culture are the important characters of this post-modern era. Shopping mall refers to a set of homogeneous and heterogeneous shops adjoining pedestrians that makes it is going for shopper to walk from store to store without interference from vehicular traffic. Thus, process of globalization through with resources are accumulated in the class structure of third world countries.

For most people shopping is primarily a means to satisfy basic needs. But, retailing along with dining, entertainment, education and culture is now one of the principal consumption activity in the post-modern metropolises. The shopping mall is one type of center where various retail units enter connected walk ways is found.

OBJECTIVES

The basic objective of the study are to verify the theoretical knowledge by practical observation and experience. The main goals of the study are concerned with the following points:

- To understand the degree of the change in urban space;

- To assess the effect of shopping mall culture on the urban way of life.

STUDY AREA

I have selected Asansol as my study area which is in Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. Recent statistics proves that Asansol is one of the fastest growing urban center. There is also a rapid change in the urban spaces as well as in the urban way of life. It is basically a mining-industrial town.

DATABASE

The study is mainly based on the primary or collected directly from the field of the study area. The demographic and detailed information about study area was gathered from Asansol Municipal Corporation Office and ADDA office. Published papers and journals are also included in the data source.

Shopping mall-concept: “A shopping mall (or simply mall) or shopping arcade is a building or set of buildings that contain stores and has interconnecting walkways enabling visitors to easily walk from store to store. The walkways may or may not be enclosed.”(Lui, 1997)

The above mentioned definition can be explained as-

A shopping mall is a shopping complex, connected by walkways. It provides shopping as well as entertainment options to the consumers. It generally, contains one anchor store, which consumes 25% of its retail space. In addition a mall contains specially stores for clothes, accessories, households, books as well as the food court, multiplexes and entertainment zones.

There has been an increasing saturation of markets in developed countries like the United States of America and Europe. Luxury brands are targeting markets with huge percentages like the emerging markets of China, India and other Asian economies. These countries have grown to be an exciting market for luxury brands of the world. The Government of India granted foreign companies to own a controlling interest of 100% in operating a single brand stores. With all these opportunities, India's changing demographics and fast-growing economy provides an excellent opportunity to emerge the shopping mall culture with those luxury brands. 'Ernest and Young stated that in previous years the growth in the number of malls in smaller cities has been 55 percentage compared to 56 percent in the metropolitan cities' (Sinha, 2010).

Effects of Post-modernism: Modernism developed mainly through the broad cultural and philosophical movement that emerged with the 'Renaissance' coming to full fruition in the late 19th and 20th

centuries. Above all, it was characterised by the belief that the application of the rational thought and scientific analysis could lead to universal progress and this rational thought should be guided by historical events. Thus modernism ultimately turns into historicism, neglecting spatialism. According to Soja (1989), “Historicism is based on an over-developed historical conceptualization of social life and social theory which actually submerges and marginalized geographical and spatial imagination.”

Post-modernism, on the other hand, a complex design of social structuralism with an emphasis over spatiality. The complexity develops in post-modernism due to lack of its clear distinction with modernism (it appears like a spectrum thus transition zone is not clear). The term post-modernism has been used differently by different disciplines. But, in Geography Post-modernism is “The openness in social and geographic enquiry, artistic experimentation and political empowerment.”(Majid Husain)

Urban Retailing structure in Asansol: With a population of more than 1 million, located in the center place of surrounding coalmines and presence of various large and medium scale industries in the vicinity, Asansol is emerging as an attractive destination for the growing retail market. Asansol has all the potential to as an organized retail destination. A recent survey of employment of local resident speaks in favour of its 21.3% of the employed people are self-employed, 48.75% in service sector, 4% professionals, 7% defense personal, 25.3% other sector of employed.

Increasing per capita income and growing demand for branded items, Asansol is already a home of various exclusive outlets of several leading brands like Raymond's, Peter England, Kuton's, P.C.Chandra. D'damas, Senco, Bata, Khadim's, Shreelather's.

Central bus stand is the main market place of Asansol. Shops are in the main market area is the property of municipal authority and developed along the G.T.Road. Now local private developers are also developing commercial real estates. A good example of such beautiful commercial development at Rambandhu talaw, Murgasol where some brands has opened up their shops. A number of restaurants opened there and transformed that area into a shopping destination. P.C.Chatterjee market and Chatterjee plaza are another two commercial developments.

Two main malls of this area are Galaxy mall and another is Sentrum mall. The former mall is in the heart of the city, at Chitra, one of the most crowded area and another is in the suburb of the city, at Srishtinagar, not so crowded area. Both malls have a number of multinational outlets of garments, cosmetic brands, groceries, electronic items,

furniture with multiplexes and of course with the attractive food sections with the multinational food brands of KFC, Dominoz, CCD, Cosmos etc. The Galaxy Mall offers very easy access to the station, bus-stand which attracts people even from Kulti, Barakar, Raniganj, Jharkhand and Purulia. The diverse mixing of culture with the growing economy of this area makes a platform to grow the new urban retailing structure- Shopping Mall culture.

The dazzling discounts, perfect ambience of shopping, attractive multinational brands and their specialty, the 'brand culture' changes the consumer perception about shopping. Shopping is no more a need with the growing mall culture, it became an entertainment purpose where people could relax themselves from the hectic work schedules and tensions and enjoy with shopping, fooding and many more.

Popularity of shopping malls: Shopping malls are very popular among young generations as they visit the malls after college and schools for chatting, gossiping and refreshment. They enjoys the upgrading purchasing power. The bright display of different branded products attract them towards this new retail trend and they prefer these places to hang out with friends. Whereas the working people attracting towards malls because it is time saver to them. They get everything they want under one roof and it is also an entertainment to them in their busy schedule.

Popularity of any shopping mall reflects the customer care and services. Customer expectation, accessibility and mobility, security, parking facility, lift facility, entertainment like soft music or air conditioner, fully computerized bill, accessing credit card and ATM etc.

Here are some data which is based on the primary data, collected from different malls in Asansol.

1. Pie Diagram showing maximum purchased goods in the shopping malls of Asansol

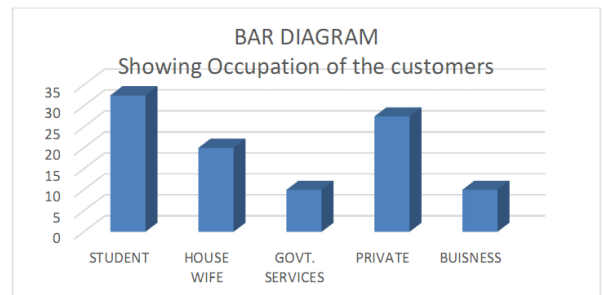
GOODS	DAILY NEEDS	ACCESSORIES	GARMENTS	GIFT ITEMS/ TOYS
%	17.5	20	45	17.5



Source: Perception survey of customers in shopping malls in Asansol

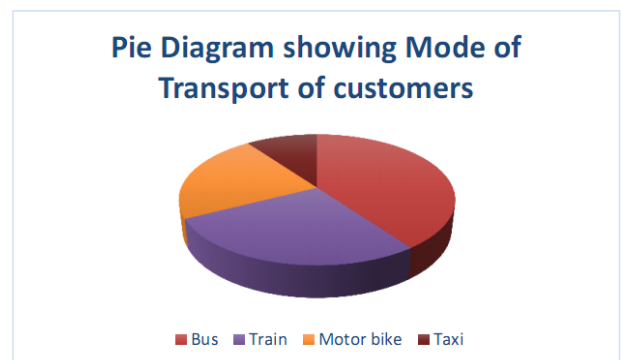
2. Bar Diagram showing Occupation of the Customers in the Shopping Malls of Asansol

OCCUPATION	STUDENT	HOUSE WIFE	GOVT. SERVICES	PRIVATE	BUISNESS
%	32.5	20	10	27.5	10



3. Pie Diagram showing Mode of Transport of the Customers in the Shopping Malls in Asansol

MODE OF TRANSPORT	BUS	TRAIN	MOTOR BIKE	TAXI
%	40	27.5	22.5	10



The retail sector in India employs nearly 21 million people, according for rapidly 6.7% of the total employment in organized retailing is still very low because of the small share of organized retail business in the total. The fact that young unemployed people constitute a higher proportion

of workforce in the shopping malls in Asansol. Newly developed malls provide great opportunity of employment. As the sample survey shows the salary depends on the experience of the mall workers.

FINDINGS:

Throughout the study, the major findings regarding the new trading trend of shopping malls in my study area are specified and clear.

- Factors such as availability of physical space, population space, population densities, city planning and socio-economic parameters have driven the market in Asansol to evolve, to a certain extent, its own definition of a mall. For example in 2002 there were no malls, in 2008 there were 5 shopping malls and in 2017 there are 8 malls.
- Heterogeneous character of diverse ethnic groups and cultural practices are responsible for various consumer behaviors and emergence of new retailing structure in the form of shopping centers.
- Asansol is heavily industrialized though many of the industries have fallen on hard times in recent years, leading to the transformation of Asansol into a trading town with the development of shopping malls. But economic deprivation is resulting in most of the cases for the small retailers who cannot cope up with the upcoming change and run in loss.
- According to the customers, the shopping mall culture has a positive side. It provides different types of goods under one roof reducing travel. They are attracted by the variety, mobility and high tech retailing. These consumers take common people in its gulf.
- With the introduction of new trading system the change in urban space in Asansol is very prominent. Pareto optimality, suburbanization of shopping centers, jump in marketization have taken place here. As a result material wealth dominates life in a rapid rate.
- The remaining part of the retailers in local market has a strong negative approach towards this mall culture. They are facing a great loss and in near future they will be at risk in terms of their survival. Unemployment will lead to the social instability and illegal activities will grow up day by day.

Apart all of these the mall culture is also responsible for social disequilibrium. As the mall provides mainly branded products which are out of the reach of lower middle class as well as poor people but when some would buy that product, a discrimination line would draw silently but strongly. Shopping malls mainly show the products which causes desires, doesn't matter who desires. Somewhere it works as a status, which drive the young people in a wrong way, where they want to live the glamorous life of branded goods no matter which socio-economic class they belong. It attracts them to the materialistic culture despite of their economic capability. It somewhere causes social degradation to the young generation.

Every coin has two sides, if this new urban retailing structure satisfy the customers with its comfort, luxury, comfortable bargains, dazzling discounts, more over the 'larger than life' feeling, then on the other side it surely changes the consumer perception, lifestyle orientation, draw distinctions in social as well as economic classes. Moreover, Shopping Mall culture is the new retailing structure which not only changes the retailing pattern but also changes the urban spaces among growing urban areas.

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