Conclusion

It is always a difficult undertaking to tie together the diverse strands of argument and material that one may have engaged with in a work of this length. A summing-up of the whole may often fall short of the possibilities of the individual parts. However, I shall attempt to briefly summarise what I have attempted to do in the previous chapters.

The period from the 1940s (where I began my first chapter) to the 1970s (where I end) marks the movement of a ‘nation’ from the late stages of a prolonged anti-colonial struggle, through a period of euphoria and hope in the first years following Independence, to a growing disenchantment with the project of nation-building and developmental progress in the 1960s (leading to frequently dystopic cultural visions of a failed nation) and finally culminating in the national Emergency and the dismal failure of democratic statehood. The various strands of left politics in West Bengal negotiated in different ways with the politics of nationalism (and later, nation-building) during the course of these four decades (a basic map of which I have tried to delineate in the chapters that have preceded this conclusion), moving from a period of conciliatory co-operation with the Nehruvian government at the centre in the 1950s, especially with regard to the shared project of economic planning, to an emergence of more antagonistic revolutionary strands through the 1960s and 1970s, leading first to the split in the CPI in 1964 and then to the Naxalite rebellion in 1967. Thereafter, in the post-Emergency period, with the coming of the Left Front government into power in the 1977 elections, naturally, the shape of left politics within the state changed drastically and so did the politico-cultural location of the Bengali group theatre, which now had far more institutional and financial support/patronage from the new state government, it being fundamentally amenable to the cultural project of a left theatre in Bengal. Thematically, therefore, this is the broad temporal span and political rubric within which I have tried to map the position of women within the group theatre in Bengal.
To briefly look back towards this trajectory, we began with the ur-history of the group theatre in the IPTA and looked at the first appearances of the bhadramahila in the field of political theatre. We also attempted to analyse how certain modalities of political and cultural action by women were legitimized at the cost of others, on the basis of deeply gendered codes of sexual and social behaviour. Moreover, we encountered the problem of the unintelligibility of women’s particular concerns within a masculinised rhetoric of political action and in the interest of a bhadralok moral code. We witnessed how the space of leadership and decisive action by women in the work of cultural organisation was diminished in favour of more subsidiary roles: women were implicitly encouraged to be committed followers and nurturers rather than decision-makers. Those who did not fit were either erased as De Silva was, or finally exhausted themselves to their last breath as Keya Chakraborty did in 1977. The representative ‘woman’ in the Bengali theatre between 1950 and 1980 was thus ‘the actress’ and not the director, producer, organiser of theatre and let alone, the leader of the group. Women in these latter roles do not begin to appear in the Bengali group theatre with any amount of prominence, force or individuality till the 1980s and 1990s. Even when women undertook these kinds of work in the period under study, the overwhelming tendency was to view/interpret their efforts within the discourse of nurture, love and service rather than leadership, labour and creative efficiency (as we have seen in Chapter Three). For example, Tripti Mitra’s work as a director never achieved any substantial prominence for her contemporaries, in spite of the large number of productions that she directed for Bahurupi between 1957 and 1980 (the year of her resignation from the group). Her productions managed to get some good reviews on occasion, but many others were regarded as dismal failures by critics and audiences alike. There appears to have been a certain haphazardness in her selection of plays and an amount of hurriedness in the way some of these productions were staged, that gives the impression she herself saw her directorial work as way to keep the organisation running in the absence of other directors. It was Tripti Mitra’s identity as an actress, therefore, that remained in the foreground and the subsumption of her role within the overarching structures of Bahurupi as an organisation sealed the fate of the evaluation of her individual directorial projects (not just for others in the group and in the audience, but perhaps also in her own eyes). (See Epilogue) With the disappearance of Anil De Silva, therefore, the figure of the woman as organiser – one who is not (just) an artiste but a leader of cultural action - disappears for several decades to come,
and it is the shape of the actress, dedicated to the words and action of a male cultural leader, that comes to represent women in theatre. Perhaps it is only once, during the 1960s and 1970s that an actress - Keya Chakraborty - appears in her work and writing as another such articulate figure, with a voice outside the theatre that is clearly discernible as her own. However, we have also witnessed how Keya, too, never manages to emerge as a leader inside a system where her very survival is put at stake – a system that is finally able to drain her quite entirely of her creative and financial energies.

In Chapter Two, we witness a development of the problematic position of the bhadramabila in Bengali theatre within a relatively new frame: the optimism surrounding the project of nation-building in the newly-independent Indian polity. In Bengal, the claims made in favour of theatre as ‘desher kaaj’ or the ‘nation’s work’ now emerge as the predominant strand of cultural discourse. Here, the bhadramabila appears (as nurturer, helpmate and student of her artiste-husband, forever held in these auxiliary roles) as a crucial cog in the wheel that establishes theatre as a genteel enterprise in the new nation, distinct from mere entertainment. Even though the rhetoric of national progress, planning and institutionalism takes over from the political discourse of struggle and anti-colonial/anti-fascist resistance, several other elements of gendered organisation (vis-à-vis family, labour and the sphere of the ‘personal’) continue on into the 1950s. Portrayals of women on stage as well, in this period, reflect a tentativeness and an ultimate stepping away from the force of the radical, even where such attempts at cultural production seem to have the redefinition of gender roles as the ostensible subject of representation.

In Chapter Three, we discuss the question of ‘women’s labour’ and its increasingly problematic status in the 1960s. The growing awareness of the emptiness and failure of the Nehruvian dream begins to be driven home to people at this time, with the rapid increase in unemployment, urban degeneration, inflation and severe food shortages, especially in West Bengal. It is within this broader context, that I place the contentious issue of women’s labour and attempt to examine its valence, especially within a non-remunerative cultural enterprise such as the group theatre. The chapter tries to examine the deeply gendered relationship between affect and labour in the group theatre, specifically through biographical materials on the life and early accidental death of the actress Keya Chakraborty. Her dogged
attempts to become a ‘whole-timer’ or an unpaid professional in the group theatre, along with the organisational work that Nandikar requires her to do, impose an immense burden of labour and financial stress on Keya Chakrabarty: a condition of precarious economic survival and continual exhaustion that finally manage to create the circumstances that take away her life.

Subsequently, Chapter Four examines the build-up towards the national Emergency and emergence of those more radical strands of left politics in West Bengal, strands that were far more openly antagonistic to the repressions of the Congress government at the centre. The representations of this antagonism in the theatre are most notably in evidence in the plays of Utpal Dutt from the late 1950s onwards. I examine these texts in order to delve into Dutt’s growing preoccupation with the fashioning of a new model of female revolutionary agency in his theatre. Whatever the actual status of women within group theatre at this time, Dutt’s work between 1959 and 1967 shows an intensive engagement with the formulation of a trenchant critique of feudal and bourgeois gender roles, with many forceful and frequent representations of women in the capacity of political/revolutionary leaders. I analyse the significance and complexities of these representations vis-à-vis the growing crisis in left politics in Bengal. As pointed out earlier, the national Emergency, when it happened, was not new to West Bengal. The atmosphere and apprehension of an intensifying political crisis had persisted since the time of the growing unrest about food shortages in the late 1950s and the mid 1960s. These portrayals of women in Dutt’s plays, often undertake a kind of harsh, radical critique of bourgeois patriarchy and the middle-class bhadralok sensibility. However, specific to these plays is the question of women’s political leadership, an issue that becomes more and more fraught in the realpolitik, given the rapid rise to power and popularity of a new female leader at the centre. The mechanisms of unprecedented repression perpetrated by the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, made the subject of women in positions of political authority increasingly pertinent within the political discourse of the day. I have here examined the association of ‘woman’ with ‘power’ in Bengali theatre from the mid 1960s to the late 1970s, whether it be through direct portrayals of revolutionary political leadership in the Dutt plays, or through an allegorical portrayal of the goddess Manasha by Sambhu Mitra in 1977. If then, to follow Partha Chatterjee, the
‘cunning of reason’ ensured that the abstract model of the ideal nation remained beyond question, even while specific manifestations of the idea of nation continued to show deviances, aberrations and failures. Mitra’s play, written in the post-Emergency India, allegorically records this process of monstrous transformation. The ‘awakening’ into freedom turns into an unreasonable nightmare. The failure of ‘nation’ here is also therefore the failure of the idea of ‘progress’ ultimately posited on notions of ‘universal’ Reason, derived from European Enlightenment thought, as Chatterjee has shown. Interestingly enough, in the play, it is the god Shiva who represents ‘Reason’ and the first awakening to freedom; and it is Shiva’s own daughter, Manasha, who ensures the return to darkness. Misogyny operates in the play at the level of discourse and symbolism, but also appears within the schematising of the lights and in the mapping of the performance space within the text.

Although Chapter Four ends with a play written in 1977, and from Chapter One to Chapter Four we have managed to cover the trajectory of the major political events that concern the scope of this work, Chapter Five goes on to address some further political and thematic concerns. It deals with a single play, also within the context of the Emergency – Jean Anouilh’s Antigone, performed by Nandikar between 1975 and 1977. This chapter attempts a textual and theoretical analysis of Anouilh’s 1942 text in comparison with the Sophoclean version, in order to arrive at an understanding of what might constitute political agency in an atmosphere of complete state repression, a situation where resistance has been effectively turned impossible. I attempt to connect this comparative textual analysis with Keya Chakraborty’s own understanding, as an actress, of the play as absolute resistance of a certain kind and the figure of Antigone as representative of a model of dissenting female existence. I endeavour to set this within the immediate context of the fraught and violent urban geography of Calcutta in the 1970s and in relation to other plays on unwitnessed deaths in the city written at the time. However, this play appears to me as a rare example within the period examined, where a certain unique imagination of female political agency (under conditions of complete repression) is made possible. This political imagination might

654 Ibid.
exist as a surplus (perhaps exceeding the conception of the ‘makers’ of this production) but is recorded insistently in the words of the lead actress, who performed Antigone as one of the last roles essayed in her life. Within this possible model of political agency, I also attempt to chart, as mentioned earlier, what kind of politics ‘a minor’ theatre may possibly do, when politics itself has become an impossibility for the great majority. Perhaps it is not a politics that can be measured in terms of efficacy: but does the insistent ‘no’ of the theatre, which (sometimes) no one hears, signify anything at all? Such and other related questions the last chapter attempts to raise.

There are several reasons why I end this thesis in the year 1980. As I have said earlier, with the coming of the Left Front government to power in 1977, the status of group theatre in Bengal changes fundamentally. It no longer retains, as a cultural enterprise, its acutely marginal and precarious politico-cultural and economic position. Patronage from the state government signifies a certain level of privilege and institutionalism, as well as a political complacency. It is not difficult to see why: being an actor in the group theatre no longer entails the survival (or even witnessing) of any day-to-day political risk quite in the same way as it did for some in the mid to late 1960s.

The period after 1977 also sees the coming together of various groups on several common platforms to address prevailing concerns. The Group Theatre Federation was formed in West Bengal in the year 1979. Immediately after this, in 1980, the Calcutta Repertory Theatre/Kolkata Natyakendra were formed. Several groups – including Nandikar (director: Rudraprasad Sengupta) and Chetana (director: Arun Mukhopadhyay) – came together to form the Kolkata Natyakendra (translated as ‘Calcutta Theatre Centre’). Celebrated German director, Fritz Bennewitz, who was an expert in Brechtian theatre, was invited to direct Galileo-r Jibon (translated from Bertolt Brecht’s The Life of Galileo) for the Natyakendra. Actor-director Sambhu Mitra, who had more or less retired from public performances at this time, agreed to return to the stage in order to play the leading part in the production. There seems to have been new hope generated around the prospect of this unprecedented coming together of several groups representing the alternative theatre movement in the city and around the renewed possibility of the establishment of a common platform which might help the movement to financially and creatively sustain itself. Rudraprasad Sengupta quotes
Sambhu Mitra (who was largely believed to have lost faith in the creative sustainability and possible unity of the movement by this time) as having said:

Of course I will act. Not once or twice, I will act continuously for two years. I am also willing to act in other productions besides this. I have a lot of market value now. You should use me and raise thirty or forty lacs in two years. Make a stage for your future work with that money, make a large place where everyone can work.\(^{655}\)

However, such efforts were not completely new. Abortive attempts towards the establishment of such common platforms for the movement were being made since the 1960s. However, nothing had, so far, achieved fruition. The desire to have a common stage, outside of governmental control and the regulating influence of political parties, was something that had driven Sambhu Mitra, especially, since the late 1950s. Mitra had always felt that it was the lack of a proper auditorium (that could be used regularly by the alternative theatre movement, not just for performances but towards a sustained practice of good theatre) that was at the root of many of the group theatre’s economic and artistic problems (say for example, simply because of the prohibitive prices of hire of the available government halls, which remains a serious problem for many theatre groups till date). He had wanted to establish a modern stage and a cultural centre for the movement, which could provide a place for regular training and practice, as well as performances. He had also felt that the National School of Drama could not possibly continue to be the sole place of training in a ‘national theatre’, especially in a country where theatre flourished in so many languages and vernaculars. He strongly felt that a truly ‘national’ theatre in India must have other, parallel, centres of excellence and training, where Hindi as a language did not dominate and continue to function as the sole medium of artistic communication. In 1967-68, to this end, *Bahurupi* had established ‘*Bangla Natmancha Pratistha Samiti*’ (‘Association for the Establishment of a Bengali Stage’), which had resolved through raise money through donations and collective performances with other groups, for the purchase of a piece of suitable land and the establishment of such an auditorium. This land was never, in the end, allotted by any of the successive governments of West Bengal and in 1984, the Association

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returned all the money that had been collected from its various donors and donated the rest of the fund to two separate hospitals in Calcutta.  

Writing on the subject of the Group Theatre Federation formed in 1979, Himani Banerjee quotes from an article by the then Secretary of the organisation, Jochhan Dastidar, who enumerates the reasons for the formation of the Federation in the journal *Theatre Bulletin*. The passage makes it clear that one of the primary, if not the most crucial, reasons for the coming together of theatre groups at this time was economic survival and the unwillingness to continue a financially precarious existence, especially under the newly-changed political circumstances. Dastidar writes:

> Increasingly economic pressures in the country, continual increase in the rental of stages, increase in the price of advertisements in local daily newspapers, the increase in the price of miscellaneous objects and facilities necessary for theatre production, all forced the theatre groups to go through an unbearable existence. […] This is the situation that forced them to realise that they would not be able to exist for too long in this way. “The Group Theatre Federation” is a result of this realization.

But clearly, such a realization had existed among the theatre groups for many years. During the most politically perilous years in the 1960s and the 1970s, no public federation or association such as this was successfully formed, even where it ought to have been deemed as an imperative for some, in order, amongst other things, to resist the inordinate violence and repression of the state on fellow-activists. Attempts at other kinds of collective failed miserably (like Sambhu Mitra’s with the *Natmancha*), after many years of struggle, due to a complete lack of governmental support and a failure of a sense of commonality. It is within the safer environs of patronage and encouragement by the Left Front government in the late seventies, that the first common platforms, associations and institutions for the group theatre began to be formed successfully in West Bengal. The *Paschim Banga Natya Akademi*, for example, was formed in September 1987 as a division of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs of the Government of West Bengal. The raison d’être of the *Akademi* has been stated as the support and benefaction of theatre work in the state of West Bengal,

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656 Ibid, 365-383.
including the organisation of festivals, training camps and workshops, as well as the funding for particular commissioned productions by important directors.

It is possible, therefore, to see how the enterprise of group theatre might have moved, slowly but surely, from the late 1970s to late 1980s, from its position on the margins of politico-cultural existence in the city of Calcutta to a far more comfortable location nearer the centres of benevolence. A left theatre nurtured by the promised benefaction of a state government, committed to the promotion of ‘left’ culture, must of necessity be significantly different from the left theatre whose activists had to, on occasion, remain in hiding for months on end for fear of arrest and torture. Ironically, sometimes the protagonists of both these theatres were the same, having come from a precarious marginality in their early lives to a comfortable relationship with political authority in their old age, their ‘own’ government now being in power. Banerjee writes on the subject:

This connection with the state and the governing party has been both an added attraction for joining the Federation, as well as cause for criticism of the government for practicing favouritism. But the Federation, which openly acknowledges its relationship to the state, does not apologise for it and points the active attempts by the Left Front government to patronize cultural activities. Theatre Bulletin published a statement to this effect: ‘It is the same Left Front Government which has formed, for the first time [in West Bengal], an advisory committee which holds a leadership position among the theatre groups. What they [the Left Front] have already achieved, or may achieve in the future, will be witnessed by the common people of the province. But at least the Left Front is thinking about groups like us. They recognise our contribution. Until now it was after-all a non left wing government which was in charge of the state of West Bengal, but they never thought about us or ever felt the necessity of even talking with us.’

This unapologetic relationship of cooperation and symbiosis with the state, as announced here, was obviously a position in which Bengali theatre had never before found itself. In my opinion, this newly secure political location fundamentally changed the ways in which group theatre fashioned itself in the years following 1977. It would be impossible to apply to theatre after this time, political rubrics and frames of analysis similar to those that we have chosen to use for the three preceding decades. The precarious, but unique, economic structure which we saw as the defining feature of group theatre at the beginning of this

658 Ibid, 62.
work, is increasingly subject to fundamentally changed forces in the cultural and economic field in the 1980s and 1990s. State support does not, of course, signify general benevolence. In my view, it is not ‘prosperity for all’ but rather a continually intensifying process of competition for state funds that perhaps came to define the subsequent era. This implied, for many privileged groups in the city, increasing skills in manipulation, organisational strategy, public relations and a canny knowledge of governmental/bureaucratic mechanisms of handing out benefits, rewards and punishments. This, rather than a concern with simple political and cultural survival, let alone resistance, in my view, shapes Bengali group theatre in the period after the 1980s till the early 2000s. It has been one of my arguments from the start that changes in the political economy of a cultural enterprise cannot but change the nature and politics of the cultural representations it produces; but to study this second transformation from struggle/ ‘movement’ to institution/etatization (after the first moment in the 1950s we encountered in Chapter Two) would be the scope and object of another thesis. It should suffice to say here, that the promise of a journey from the margin to centre of politico-cultural life did not essentially mean that there was always more money than before and certainly not for everyone. In fact, many of the financial difficulties of the groups not only persisted but grew through the 1980s and 1990s. Both audiences and standards of quality were allegedly lost, especially with the unprecedented growth in the popularity of regional/national television in the 1980s and international television (through satellite) in the post-liberalisation era of the 1990s. However, both the expectation of favours from the state having increased and ideological obstacles towards the acceptance of such support having been removed, if not the actual finances, then the politics around the finances of group theatre changed significantly at this time. But as with most political expectations from institutions of the state, these too were more-or-less at an end by the late 1990s. This led, thereafter, to an unprecedented turn towards corporate funding - unprecedented not in terms of scale or frequency, but simply as a matter of an ideological choice that had never been made before. Arun Mukherjee, one of the scions of theatre during the early years of the Left Front, sums this disillusionment up succinctly in a colloquium organised by the *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* in the year 2000:

In fact we had other expectations. We had thought that there were so many groups who wanted to do theatre, but not enough auditoriums. Simple expectations. If there were more auditoriums, there would be more opportunity to do theatre […] some
people are of the opinion the basic character of Bangla theatre and the role it played before the Left Front came to power was bound to change. The anti-establishment character of Bangla theatre – what would become of it when the left came to power? These doubts began to surface very soon after the Left Front assumed power. For example, one of my plays was written before the Left Front came to power and was performed for them. When I was presenting it again after they had come to power, it struck me that the same play could be used against them. [...] The Left Front has never put any obstacles in the path of our theatre movement. They have treated us with a great deal of respect. But neither have they been able to help us progress to any great extent. In fact, in no way have they been able to take this movement forward. We’ve benefited from the new auditoriums they have set up, several government grants have come our way, the Natya Akademi has been set up, but the entire approach has been very scattered and sporadic, with no long term plan, no definite goals, no step by step implementation policy that would ultimately lead to specific changes.\footnote{Anjum Katyal ed., Seagull Theatre Quarterly, Issue 27/28, Dec. 2000 (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000), 48-49. [Emphasis mine]}

The problem perhaps lies in the missing question: does a ‘movement’ supported by the governmental institutions of the state continue to remain a movement? Whatever the economic and logistical difficulties that persist within it, does it sustain the essential qualities that had defined its modes of operation in the previous decades? Does it continue to be similarly invested in its earlier motivations – the imperatives of struggle, critique and resistance? Can a theatre of protest retain its character when it gains the approval, endorsement and ‘respect’ of the state, even if it is run by an ostensible ‘Left Front’? In addition, of course, we have already encountered at the beginning of this work, the far more basic question of whether there had been a single ‘Bengali group theatre movement’ to speak of to begin with. The examination of these and other such questions vis-à-vis Bengali theatre post-1977 is beyond the scope of this particular thesis. However, these are crucial problems which remain to be considered in order to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of post-Independence Bengali theatre as a whole.

The other major transformation in Bengali theatre in the period after 1980 that must be taken into consideration is the emerging into prominence of women directors, who also appear, in some cases, as the creative and organisational heads of particular theatre groups. Even though Tripti Mitra had been directing plays for Bahurupi since the late 1950s, she had never emerged as a creative and organisational leader for the group in much the same way in which Sambhu Mitra had established himself, nor had she displayed a consistent and focused
directorial concern with feminist questions, or even women’s problems *per se*. Her 1971 production *Aparajita* was, of course, an exceptional articulation for the times and will be discussed further in the Epilogue. In the work of the new generation of female directors, however, in contrast, feminist issues surface with far more direct force than ever before. The first indication of this was perhaps the staging of Shaoli Mitra’s production *Nathabati Anathabat* in 1983. The unexpected success of this production and the numerous demands for call shows made it necessary for Shaoli Mitra to found her own theatre group *Pancham Baidik*, which continues to be one of the established groups in contemporary Calcutta. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan writes in her 1993 book *Real and Imagined Women* that Mitra’s production (which she saw in New Delhi in 1991) was one of the contemporary cultural texts where “the representation of the relative freedom of women is encoded neither as an absence of conflict (as in commercial advertisements), nor as the resolution of conflict (as in television images), but as the product of a specific conjuncture of social and historical circumstances.”\(^{660}\) She goes on to say that “the common features and concerns of these texts are meaningful for an exploration of alternative structures of representation. A feminist consciousness that is historically ‘modern’ informs the subjectivity of the women represented in these texts; and/or an actual or incipient female solidarity (the condition of collectivization) is set in motion; thematically, issues of tradition and modernity are engaged with strenuously; and formal innovativeness marks their textual modes.”\(^{661}\) Some of the other women who come into prominence as directors after this time are Usha Ganguly of *Rangakarmee* (even though her major work is in Hindi, it would be difficult to write a history of women and Calcutta theatre post-1980 without a reference to her work), Seema Mukhopadhyay of *Rongrup*, Jayati Bose, Sohag Sen of *Ensemble*, Dolly Basu of *Chupkatha* and Swatilekha Sengupta of *Nandikar*. This somewhat gradual, but very definite, change within the field of Bengali theatre – and the move, on the part of some directors, towards a focused feminist consciousness and formal experimentation - demands specific readings and a different kind of study than what the present work has entailed. This change from the 1970s onwards (starting somewhat hesitantly with Tripti Mitra’s directorial work and culminating in an entirely new generation of far more self-assured female directors in the 1980s and 1990s)


\(^{661}\) Ibid, 131-132
is such that in the year 2000, Samik Bandyopadhyay is able to justifiably say in his introductory note to the *Seagull Theatre Quarterly*’s actresses’ colloquium:

> There are a large number of women directors in Bengali theatre. It is a matter of great pride for Bengali theatre that there are so many of them working independently, a phenomenon which is not found in the theatre of any other region in India [...] Why have they become directors? I have often felt that it was out of a sense of lack of fulfilment in their roles as actresses, where they wanted to do something but were foiled.  

As a feminist historian of Bengali theatre in the 1980s and 1990s, therefore, one would no longer be required to read simply for absences or attempting to unearth the traces of a nascent feminist consciousness, but would be able to engage with (once again in terms of both ‘proxy’ and ‘portrait’) far more directly feminist material, produced by women and explicitly concerned with the ‘woman’s question’ *per se*. One would also able to study, in this period, the emergence of women in positions of leadership within this cultural field. This would mean, further, to examine whether just to have women as creative directors of groups naturally entails any essential change in their hierarchical structures and the values that determine their modes of operation as organisations. In my opinion, the latter does not automatically follow the former. Does a replacement of individual men by individual women guarantee a dispersal of (entrenched) patriarchal modes of operation in a cultural collective? The establishment of any simple cause-and-effect relationship vis-à-vis this question would mean risking a dangerously simplistic essentialism that I would be wary of encouraging both as a scholar and as a feminist. However, undertaking an in-depth analysis of these subjects would entail a different framing of research questions from the ones that the present study allows. It would also mean an intensive engagement with the work of female directors from the 1980s onwards, including their own narratives, viewpoints, creative productions and organisational roles. This, once again, is beyond the scope of the work at hand.

The factors enumerated above have been the primary reasons for concluding this work in the year 1980. There are various other questions that remain to be explored by future researchers in the field. For example, it would be extremely fruitful, in my view, to undertake  

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a study of the interfaces, tussles and exchanges between commercial and group theatre in Bengal in this period\textsuperscript{663}, especially through the work of professional actresses like Ketaki Dutta who successfully inhabited both these worlds. Dutta’s memoirs\textsuperscript{664} provide an incredible insight into the life of the professional actress who is not a political or cultural activist, but one who comes into the theatre primarily in order to make a living out of very difficult circumstances. The narrative of Dutta’s almost self-destructive passion for and lifelong engagement with the theatre, in the midst of a consistently difficult financial and personal life, allows us a glimpse into the experiences of an actress who never quite acquires the status of 	extit{bhadramabila} and is consistently humiliated for it. Her humiliations and tribulations as an actress would appear, in my opinion, as an interesting foil to the 	extit{bhadramabila} actress in this period. It would also allow us to tease out the distinctions and commonalities between women from different classes, defined by society variously according to their conjugal, educational and economic status. Personal records of Dutta’s forays into the group theatre towards the later part of her career provide us with the rare perspective of the outsider in the world of 	extit{bhadralok} ‘refined’ culture. It is also an interesting entry point into the study of the greater corpus of Bengali theatre at this time, especially vis-à-vis the relationship between the commercial and ‘art’ theatre, which mutually constitute and define each other as cultural enemy and other.

Other issues that would be greatly worth exploring for future research in the field would be the complex, and often fraught, relationship (throughout this period) between Calcutta as the centre of cultural production and the small towns of Bengal, where many smaller groups continued to function in relative anonymity. For the small town theatre practitioner, Calcutta was (and to some extent continues to be) the place of desire and inspiration. This factor has consistently conditioned their modes of creative production and day-to-day functioning. Both funding and cultural survival was, of course, far more difficult at the peripheries than at the centre. It would be interesting, therefore, to examine how the obvious cultural hegemony exercised by Calcutta as the capital of the state has defined the

\textsuperscript{663} This would include Tripti Mitra’s stint with commercial theatre and Keya Chakraborty’s appeal to 	extit{Nandikar} to be allowed to act in a professional production, discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, respectively.

\textsuperscript{664} Ketaki Dutta, 	extit{Nijer Kathay, Takro Lekhay}, ed., Samik Bandyopadhyay (Calcutta: Thema, 2010).
contours of creative existence for the small town theatre artiste. It appears to me that, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, many women from these peripheries travelled to the city in order to be part of its perceivedly flourishing culture, wishing often to become actresses in the metropolitan group theatre. Since the 1980s onwards, of course, the added ambition of somehow finding work in the television allowed theatre to be perceived as the first stepping-stone towards a more glamorous acting career. This tendency, along with the influx of the small-town aspiring actress into the city, only grew with the sudden boom in satellite television channels in the 1990s. A study of the desires, frustrations and ideological ambivalence of the small-town girl in the Calcutta group theatres would provide an insight not just into themodalities of cultural hegemony in the field, but would also allow one to study the ways in which commercial television infiltrated, as an insidiously decisive factor, into the internal operations of Bengali group theatre, which had for so long been so intensely concerned with preserving its cultural and ideological ‘purity’. Also important to examine here would be the slow but assured entry of corporate capital into the group theatre from the late 1990s onwards (starting with the organisation of annual theatre festivals), as well as the increasing uncertainty of some directors about the sustainability of the permanently existing group, in the earlier model, as an appropriate platform for the production of theatre. The image of actor in the group theatre as a professional freelancer rather than a dedicated family member has, in my view, become far more acceptable within this scenario. The collapse of the popularity of commercial Bengali theatre since the 1980s (one could presume it was unable to withstand the dual pressures of the growing popularity of both television and professional jatra) has meant that old anxieties about ideological purity and the policing of borders in the group theatre has somewhat diminished in this period. It seems to me that some of the practices of the commercial theatre that were earlier subtly frowned upon are now noticeably on the increase within the group theatre. Freelance actors within the more privileged circuits of Calcutta group theatre, just like the office club performers of the old era, are now able to quite frequently demand and receive payment for their work and in my view, this might be well on the way towards becoming a norm. These changes have led, in some cases, from the 2000s onwards, to the formation of contingent or ad hoc groups based on the needs of particular productions – a mode of operation more akin to film production, company theatre and some jatra troupes.
However, all the questions discussed above draw from my very general perceptions about the phase in the history of Bengali group theatre that immediately follows the period of my research. To make more assured claims on these subjects would be the work of another project, which would require an intensive study of those forces of cultural and economic change that come into play in the field of Bengali group theatre after 1977. I could only attempt, as I have done above, to tentatively point towards what some of these transformations were, in my opinion. I have taken the liberty, in this conclusion, to raise some of these questions for the benefit of future research and researchers without necessarily attempting to answer them preemptively.