Conclusion
In modern Bengal, Durgā is worshipped in her Mahiṣaśamantā form, along with her four children, namely Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa and Kārtika. The depiction of the goddess as the slayer of the asura along with the emphasis on her identity as the mother of four children may be interpreted as the classic combination of the "aggressive" and the "loving" mother in the person of Durgā. A close perusal of the early brahmanical Upapurāṇas of Bengal, however, reveals that the identity of the goddess as mother had been gradually constructed and the portrayal of the goddess as mother and the meanings of motherhood changed considerably in the first six to seven hundred years of the entry of the goddess in the brahmanical pantheon.

After the absorption of the local goddesses within the brahmanical fold, the primary identity of the goddesses along with that of Durgā, have been erased or modified through denigration of their earlier subjectivities and through the construction of new multistoried identities. Various strategies were deployed in different texts to subordinate the goddess to patriarchal figures and patriarchal cultural norms that brahmanism sought to impose. A brief summary of the politics of subordination, transformation of the goddesses and the worship of Durgā in Bengal as described in the four chapters of the thesis is given below.

Summary of the chapters

Chapter 1: To Be or Not-to be: Śivā and other Goddesses in the Devī Purāṇa

The DP extols the goddesses as warrior and the narrative section of the Purāṇa is all about the slaying of different asuras by the goddess army. The Great Goddess of
the Purāṇa is Śivā and she is described to be the Ultimate One in abstraction. Other goddesses are said to be her partial manifestations, but the distinct identity and entity of the different goddesses are maintained in the text. In this chapter, I have dealt with the slaying of the asuras named Ghora, Ruru, Bala and Subala by the goddess. The goddesses in the DP are the one who act. They kill Ghorāsura and Ruru in the battle-field and Bala and Subala are killed through the use of mantra vidyā. However, the goddesses are often placed at the disposal of Śiva who dictates terms, even to the Great Goddess. The agency of the goddess(s) is often nullified through the introduction of the character of Śiva over and above Śivā and other goddesses. The DP however, does not offer any justification for the goddesses appearing as a warrior in her female form. In the Ghora and Ruru episode, the army of the goddesses are depicted to fight with the asura army, in the battle-field. The warrior-self of the goddesses in the DP is an unmitigated one. The “creation” motif is in its incipient form in the DP. In the Ghorāsura episode, the principal goddess is not a creation or emanation from the body of the gods. The gods only “create” her mount lion and the kanyakās who accompany the goddess in the battlefield. In the Ruru episode, the warrior goddesses, the saktis emerge from the body of the gods, but they are also not the creation of the gods per se. They are nascent within the gods in the form of light and they assume visible form, being propitiated by the respective gods. The DP thus maintain the existential autonomy of being of the goddesses, but tries to negate their autonomy of person. Attempts are made to absorb the independent entity of the goddesses into that of the gods. Thus, the goddess Śivā is often said to reside in the half body of Śiva and the other saktis are also present in the body of the gods, in the nascent form of light. The goddesses, including Śivā assume an independent entity, only when the god(s) wish
that it be so. The goddesses in the DP are however, not placed within the family structure. Even Śivā is not depicted as the wife of Śiva and the goddess is rarely evoked as the mother in the text. There is no myth of the goddess killing Mahiśasura in the DP, but we have the iconographic details of Durgā, slaying the asura along with his army. The DP prescribes the worship of different goddesses in the month of Āśvina and upholds the worship of the goddesses in autumn as mahotsava (the great festival).

Chapter 2: The Sexual-other and the martial-mother: The Goddesses in the Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa

The DBP elaborates the myths of the slaying of Madhu-Kaiṭabha, Mahiśasura and Śumbha-Nisumbha, in great details. In the Purāṇa however, the goddess's warrior-self is considered to be an exception. In most of the accounts, it is explained that the goddess appears as a warrior because the particular asura can be killed only by a woman. The goddess as the Utimate one is said to be eternal, but the embodied goddess who appears in the battlefield is a “creation” of the gods and other goddesses who fight in the battlefield are often emanations from the principal goddess. The strength and vigour of the goddess who fights in the battle-field, is thus made a derivative of the gods. The DBP also seeks to negate the warrior-self of the goddess by constructing the feminine as the frail, gentle, sexual other of men and as the martial mother. The construction of the feminine as the sexual-other is made through the ‘projection’ of the asuras on the goddess. The goddess herself is not appropriated completely in the role of the sexual other, as the kāmini. Rather the goddess as the Supreme One is dissociated from ordinary women. The goddess who fights in the battle-field is accepted only in the
form of the martial mother who protects her children by slaying the asuras. The principal goddess in the DBP is the independent autonomous one, but her anśas or saktis are associated with the gods as companions or consorts. Durgā is ascribed prominence in the text and described as one of the five Prakṛtis, who are the anśas of the Great Goddess. In the DBP, Durgā appears as the slayer of the asura Durgama, as the goddess of vegetation and as the dispeller of durgati (distress). The DBP prescribes the performance of the navarātra vrata in autumn and suggests the worship of different goddesses including Durgā.

Chapter 3: In the Family, On the corpse: The goddesses in the Kālikā Purāṇa

In the KP, the portrayal of the goddesses in the narrative and the prescriptive sections are quite contrary to each other. In the narrative section, the goddess is the Ultimate, autonomous one in abstraction. The Ultimate goddess, often referred to as Mahāmāyā is said to be born as Sati and later as Kālī/ Pārvatī. The embodied goddesses are portrayed as the daughter, wife and the potential mother and the thrust of the narrative section in the KP is on circumscribing the goddesses within familial relationships. The goddess Kālī/Pārvatī is said to be the mother of Skanda and Bhṛṅgin and Mahākāla. However, the goddess is not the biological mother — she neither gives birth, nor does she play a significant role in their nurturing and upbringing. In the prescriptive section, the goddesses are not related to any god. In this section, we come across Kālī and other goddesses of similar attributes and iconographic features. They are dark, nude, wearing garland of human skulls and either seated or standing on corpses. The Purāṇa is completely silent about the subjective practices of the yoginis.
associated with the goddess cults. The meanings and symbolisms of Mahāmāyā, Kālī and other goddesses in the local culture(s) were thus altered in the KP by spousifying these goddesses to Śiva in the narrative section and by erasing the cultural norms and subjective practices associated with the local goddesses, in the prescriptive section. The KP offers a detailed prescription for the worship of Durgā, Bhadrakālī and Ugracandra in autumn. Kālī, Durgā or other goddesses do not appear as the warrior in the battlefield, in the text. The goddess is seen as the slayer of Mahiṣāsura only in her iconographic details and the myth of her fight with the asura is clubbed together with her iconographic features.

Chapter 4: The inside and Outside of the Domestic:
Durgā Kālī as the Great Goddesses in the Mahābhārgava Purāṇa

In the MBP, Durgā and Kālī appear as the Great Goddess. They are said to be the the gehini (home maker) of Śaṅkara. Durgā is not depicted in the domestic space in the MBP, but the Great Goddess promises to be born as Sātī or Pārvatī to beget Hara as her husband. Unlike the KP, in the MBP, the goddess(s) embodied as Sātī or Pārvatī is not completely dissociated from her Supreme self and they challenge the norms of the domestic that brahmanism seeks to impose. However, the goddess can break open the confines of the domestic, only in the terrible form of Kālī. The MBP accommodates Kālī within the myths only in specific moments and with the complete alteration of her meanings. In the text, she no more stands on the corpse but, on the chest of her husband Śiva who is said to lie under her feet as the corpse. Kālī is acclaimed as one of the Supreme forms of the goddess and the iconographic features of Durgā is often similar
to Kālī. However, none of these goddesses are depicted to fight in the battlefield or kill the *asuras*, either in the myths or in their iconographic features. The *MBP* introduces the term *akālabodhana* (untimely awakening) for the worship of the goddess in autumn and Durgā is the only goddess whose worship is prescribed in the text.

**The Rise of Durgā(?)**

The rise of Durgā in Bengal as the brahmanical Great Goddess is thus achieved at the cost of the loss of the goddess matrix of the local culture(s). The identification of different goddesses as one or as the *aṃśas* or *śaktis* of the Great Goddess leads to the obfuscation of different goddesses as distinct entities. Durgā is not depicted within the domain of the domestic in person in the texts, I have surveyed. However, the shift in the identification of Durgā with warrior goddesses in the earlier *Purāṇas* to the later identification with the spousified goddesses like Sātī or Pārvatī marks a seminal juncture in the evolution of Durgā in Bengal. In different stages of the evolution of Durgā, traced in this thesis, there is no “split” between the aggressive and the nurturing goddess. Durgā is not perceived as bad mother because of her aggressive role as the slayer of the *asuras*, nor is she celebrated as the birth-giving mother. The brahmanical authors of Bengal attempted to make the warrior-self of the goddess obscure, but the perpetuation of the worship of the goddess as Mahiṣāsura-mardini in modern Bengal proves that the contestation and negotiation remained an ongoing process, even after the composition of these *Upaurāṇas*.