Introduction
The Quest

Gods are rarely evoked as fathers in the South Asian context. On the contrary, in popular parlance and often in academic literature, the goddesses are essentially mothers – the mother goddesses. This thesis seeks to underline that motherhood of the goddess(s) is a construct, a spatio-temporal variable and it looks into the making of different identities of the goddess(s), with particular reference to Durgā in Bengal.

The worship of the goddess has been a characteristic of most of the ancient civilizations. Yet, while in most parts of the civilized world male hierophanies gradually replaced the female, goddess cult continues to be a dominant feature in India, particularly in Bengal. One explanation is that the ‘apotheosis’ of motherhood is actually compensatory which sought to recompense the subdued position of women in society. The phenomenon of the subjugation of women is however, characteristic of other parts of the world as well and therefore, fails to explain the peculiarity of Indian culture. Another explanation is that the worship of the goddesses never ceased among the autochthonous people in the vast spread of the subcontinent. In fact, most of the scholarly works dealing with Indian goddesses subscribe to the view that the impetus behind the worship of the goddess is non-brahmanic and non-sanskritic. It is emphasized that there has been a continuous interaction between the ‘Great’ and the ‘little’ traditions and this has led to the perpetuation of the worship of the goddess in the Indian subcontinent. However, the question remains how the apparent contradictions between the religious phenomenon of the worship of the feminine
principle and the sociological realities of a patriarchal society have been reconciled in
the Indian context. I seek to examine this question with particular reference to the
evolution of goddess Durgā as the predominant goddess in Bengal, in terms of her
theology and gender( ed) roles. In this thesis, Durgā is situated in the goddess matrix of
Bengal as reflected in the *Upapurāṇas* of Bengal. It is shown how the rise of Durgā in
the brahmanical pantheon of Bengal was integral to her subordination to the
brahmanical patriarchal cultural norms and the gradual transformations in the
characterisation of the goddess matrix in general and Durgā in particular, has been
traced.

In Bengal, brahmanical penetration was of a relatively later date. The earlier
brahmanical literature records the gradual expansion of brahmanism towards the east,
but the influence of brahmanism on the local culture(s) gained momentum only from
the post-Gupta period. The royal patronage extended by the Pāla, Candra-Kamboja
rulers as well as the Sena-Varmaṇas greatly enhanced the propagation of brahmanical
religion in this region. The persuasive entry of the goddesses into the brahmanical
literature of the region is evident from the composition of the *Upapurāṇas* (roughly 6th-
7th century A.D. to 13th-14th century A.D.). The goddess appeared in her full-bloom in
the brahmanical literature, for the first time in the *DM*, a section of the *Markandeya
Purāṇa*. While F. E Pargiter dates it as late as 9th century A.D., the more general view
is that the text belongs to 400-600 centuries A.D.. The goddesses often figured in the
*Mahāpurāṇas*, but they were usually graded hierarchically lower to the male figures in
the pantheon. Like the *DM*, the *Upapurāṇas* of Bengal, particularly the *DP*, the *DBP*,
the *KP* and the *MBP* uphold the theological supremacy of the goddess and the other
Upapurāṇas of the region also accord considerable significance to the goddesses. Kunal Chakrabarti in his book, *Religious Process: The Making of the Religious Tradition of Bengal* points to the literary and ethnographic evidences that indicate the pervasiveness of the worship of goddesses in Bengal.¹ More importantly, as Chakrabarti points out, “the almost obsessive involvement of the Bengal Purāṇas”² with the goddesses is an indirect, but persuasive proof of the pre-eminence of the goddesses in this region, prior to brahmanical penetration. Buddhism also underwent a marked transformation with the absorption of panoply of goddesses and other Tantric elements, in the region of Bengal.³

The appropriation of the goddesses in the brahmanical pantheon was however, not without its own twists and turns. Brahmanism succeeded in establishing its domination over the local culture(s) only by a radical, but slow alteration in the local cultural ethos and the goddess was one of the primary tools through which the gradual inculcation of brahmanical values was achieved. The goddess as the primary symbol of the Ultimate was retained, but subtle changes were constantly effected to erase her subjective associations with the local culture(s) and to create new meanings and symbolisms. The first six-seven hundred years of interaction between brahmanism and the local culture(s) was thus fraught with tension, contestation and negotiation which not only transformed the local culture(s) and its symbolisms, but also shaped brahmanism considerably. The goddess as a symbol of the local culture was retained, her supremacy asserted in abstraction. However, there was a slow, yet steady undercutting of her autonomy and a gradual dissociation from the cultural norms with which she was associated earlier.
Historiography

In recent years, considerable work has been done on the goddess cults, both in India and in the west. The approaches are diverse and so are the findings. An overview of some of the major works on the goddess cults in India and Bengal is as follows.

T.B. Coburn's Devī Mahātmya: The crystallization of the goddess Tradition, is a comprehensive study of the DM and its vision of the goddess as the Ultimate divine principle. The originality of the work lies in Coburn's approach in identifying the modalities of adaptation of the goddess in Sanskrit tradition. His scope is limited, but unique is his focus on the Sanskritic evidences, earlier than or roughly contemporary to the DM for goddess worship. Coburn looks upon Sanskritisation as a literary phenomenon and examines the historicity of the textual layers of DM, embedded in its epithets, myths and hymns. There is virtually no precedence of full-blown goddess worship in Sanskrit literature, prior to the DM. Coburn, however, shows how the DM integrated the non-Aryan goddesses into the Sanskritic tradition by using older motifs. Part one of the book, deals with the historicity of the textual layers of the DM. Coburn examines how a particular epithet is used in the DM and also its association and usage in earlier texts, particularly the Vedic and the epic literature. Part two of the study focuses on the three mythic accounts of the goddess's encounter with the demons. It shows how the different versions of the myths in the epics, early Purāṇas and other secular literature were integrated and coalesced with the goddess tradition. In part three, Coburn provides annotated translations of the various hymns in praise of the goddess
from the *RgVeda*, the *RgVeda Khila*, the *Mahabharata*, the *HV* and the *DM*. The three-tier structure of the study is indeed well knit in its understanding of the textual reality as well as that of the text-context relationship.

Tracy Pintchman's *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*, is an attempt to explore the dynamics and structural layers of the process of evolution of the goddess in brahmanical tradition. The author's principle focus is on cosmological and cosmogononical attributes of the goddess and she shows how the abstract philosophical notions of *Prakṛti*, *Māyā* and *Śakti* were deified. The study includes a vast range of texts, scriptural and philosophical. The starting point of Pintchman's inquiry is the association with and/or participation of the Vedic goddesses in the process of creation. Pintchman notes that the Vedic goddesses played two important functional roles in this context. They either serve as the *prima matter* from which creation takes place or act as the principal source of cosmic energy or both. The author then looks into the notions of *Prakṛti*, *Māyā* and *Śakti* as expounded by the various philosophical schools. She points out the similarities between the Vedic metaphors and allegories of creation and those used in the philosophical texts. Pintchman further shows how the philosophical notions of *Prakṛti*, *Māyā* and *Śakti* were grafted onto the divine goddess in the vast body of Puranic literature. She examines the various accounts of creation in different *Purāṇas* and the role of the goddesses in the same. Finally, the author observes how the conceptualisation of the goddess shapes the feminine perception of gender in Hindu society.

In the book, *Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Divine Marriage in the South*
Indian Saiva Tradition, David D. Shulman looks into the myths of the Tamil temple shrines. Shulman observes that the persistent themes in Tamil myths are the search for power and the attempt to make this search subservient to an ideal of purity. According to Tamil belief, all creative processes are integrated with impurity. Life is won out of death. Sacrifice therefore, symbolizes regeneration of new life, not simply the end of previous existence. In Tamil myths, it is the goddess who is seen as the embodiment of power, because she is creative and life-giving. The marriage of the god in the shrine and the goddess is regarded as sacrifice in which the god is slain, but brought back to life by the bride. Thus, the goddess is considered to be simultaneously creative and destructive. Though she is power embodied, her involvement in death and rebirth pollutes her. Shulman argues that the Tamil solution to deal with this contradiction is to split the goddess into a dark, violent, erotic figure epitomized in Kālī and into the golden, peaceful, and submissive goddess Gaurī. In another level, the ambivalence is met by depicting the sexually aggressive and violent goddess as male and then the male and the female halves are united in the figure of the androgyne.

Carmel Berkson's The Divine and Demoniac: Mahisa's Heroic Struggle with Durga, focuses on the myth of Mahiṣamardinī as a functioning symbol. Berkson refutes the view that the buffalo demon is an evil one, belonging to the chaotic underworld. Rather, in Berkson's analysis Mahiṣa is the hero. According to Berkson, Mahiṣa lives in the threshold of the conscious and unconscious. On the one hand, he strives towards life apart, and on the other hand, his desire is to merge with the mother goddess. Berkson says that Mahiṣa, the ancient bull-hero, the fecundator of the earth in Indian myth is the bearer of vicarious guilt. His relationship with the goddess is
inseparable. An incestuous mother-child, love-hate relationship interplays between them. According to Berkson, the potential of inherent violence in male-female opposition is one of the most important aspects of the myth. The relationship between Mahiṣa and the goddess manifests in various levels — psychologically the demon and the goddess identifies with each other, both of them moves from bestiality to divinity—that is their only reality. There is no singular essentialism in them. Both of them represent evil and danger, power and justice, and both of them are lustful and capable enough to bring about the necessary disorder for creation. Berkson argues that the goddess ultimately wins because she is the more violent and rapacious of the two. Her gender reversal hides the incestuous longing they both share, and it is only Mahiṣa who is punished. The author proposes that the myth is concerned with reconstructing consciousness in the direction of the autonomy, much longed for, and he sees Mahiṣa's heroic battle with the mother principle as a symbolic battle for all would-be free men.

C. Mackenzie Brown's *The Triumph of the goddess: The Canonical Models and Theological Visions of the Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa,* is an exposition of the modalities of the vindication of the Great Goddess tradition. The study focuses on the various strategies deployed by the authors of the *DBP* to achieve that goal. Part I of the book shows how the *DBP* is largely modeled on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa, canonically, theologically and mythologically and yet, how it attempts to supersede the same. The ancient Viśṇu motifs are picked up by the author(s) of the *DBP* to dishonor or embarrass the god and to put him in an inferior position to that of the goddess. Part II of the book makes a comparative study between the *DM* and the *DBP* and analyzes the revisioning of the goddess in the *DBP*. In this section, Brown argues that the tension
between the horrific and benign aspects of the goddess in the DM is sought to be resolved in the DBP by emphasising the supremely compassionate motherhood of the goddess and by revealing her androgynous character. Part III of the book deals with the Bhāgavata Gīta and the Devī Gīta and other theophanies of Viṣṇu and the Devī, which are parallel to the two Gītas. Brown suggests that though the Devī Gīta and related sections reaffirms that the goddess is the divine mother, at a higher level she is perceived to encompass and transcend the boundaries of gender. Thus, according to Brown, the goddess in the DBP is not only victorious over the male gods, but also over her own feminine self.

In his book, Religious Process: The Making of a Regional Tradition, Kunal Chakrabarti looks into the textual strategies of the Bengal Purāṇas and argues that the Puranic process was of critical importance for the establishment of brahmanical hegemony and also for the making of the religious tradition of Bengal. He shows how the corpus of Puranic literature in Bengal evolved as a result of interaction between the orthodox brahmanical authority and the local traditions. Chakrabarti uses the models of Sanskritization and the ‘great-little’ traditions as heuristic devices to understand the Puranic texts of Bengal. However, he emphasizes that neither the ‘Great’ and ‘little’ traditions can be looked upon as static entities, nor the process of assimilation can be treated as a simple unilinear process. The author prefers to use the term negotiation, instead of acculturation in the Bengal context. He argues that the Bengal Purāṇas had to accommodate multiple voices because brahmanism had to ceaselessly negotiate and co-opt with the indigenous cultures and its goddesses. The brahmanical authors found the “appropriate medium of assimilation of local cultural forms”, in the goddesses.
Thus, according to Chakrabarti, the process of codification of the Bengal Purāṇas can be seen as the brahmanical attempt to enter into a dialogue with the indigenous population so that its prescriptive norms were accepted and internalized by the local people.

The Take Off

The symbols and the meanings of the goddesses within patriarchal brahmanism and the general co-relation between goddess and mortal woman have been worked upon by a number of scholars. The strategies deployed to accommodate the feminine principle within brahmanical culture have also been pointed out. However, the possible meanings of the goddesses in the pre-brahmanical culture have not yet been deciphered considerably. Moreover, the strategies of accommodation are usually located in a specific moment, or juncture in history. These scholarly literatures have contributed immensely to our understanding of the perpetuation of the worship of the goddesses within brahmanism. However, as Kunal Chakrabarti points out, the inclusion of the goddess into the brahmanical fold was neither a static process, nor could it be achieved in a single stroke. He says, “But legitimation is a tricky business. Mere assertion of omnipotence does not make the goddess acceptable, nor are past identities easily erased. It requires patient groundwork spread over a long period of time, careful evaluation of the factors to be added or subtracted, highlighted or underplayed to obtain that delicate balance which does not impair recognition of the original model.” In order to understand the process of appropriation and subsequent subordination of the
goddess, it is necessary to look into the dynamics of the changes gradually effected in a spread of several centuries.

The history of the evolution of individual goddesses, like Kālī or Rādhā in temporal or geographical spread have been traced. The particularities of the transformation of the goddess Durgā over the centuries are however, often lost either in the shadow of the Great goddess or in the generalities of a myriad of goddesses. In the DM, which is the earliest scripture that fleshes out the theology of the goddess, Durgā is identified with different goddesses as one. But, the question remains whether all other texts subsequent to the DM, successfully crystallise the goddesses into a single homogeneous whole or patriarchy had to come to terms with the distinct identities of the goddesses, time and again because of the historico-contextual variations within which the goddess cult(s) is/are concretely situated.

Another important question in this regard is how patriarchy deals with the varied identities of goddesses. The general assumption is that brahmanism primarily recognizes two categories of goddesses – the benevolent, nurturing goddesses and the bloodthirsty, erotic and therefore, malevolent goddesses. While the benevolent goddesses are accepted in the mainstream, malevolent ones are pushed into the 'polluted zone'. The question is whether the binary of benevolence and malevolence can always be maintained or there emerged a composite theology of the goddess, which encompassed both the benign and the terrific aspects. More importantly, we need to ponder whether only the terrifying, aggressive and erotic goddesses threaten patriarchy or it is uncomfortable with the benign mother as well. Sudhir Kakkar and Ashis Nandy
tend to show how the fear-psychosis of Indian male of being engulfed by an all-encompassing benign mother shapes Indian cultural and religious understanding. Such studies emphasise the acceptance of the Ultimate cosmic feminine principle as pre given. But, if we have to accept that large-scale symbolic reparations can be made to defy the authority of the feminine principle, then is it not worth seeing whether the process of acceptance of such authority itself was uncontested or not. Were the reparations made only at the symbolic level or it operated at the level of philosophical and theological formulations as well.

These are the questions which have led to the formulation of this work and I have tried to answer these questions by looking into the Upapurāṇas of Bengal.

Primary Sources

The Puranic literature is broadly divided into two categories, the Mahāpurāṇas and the Upapurāṇas. The Mahāpurāṇas are defined according to the five identifying characteristics or the pañcalakṣaṇas and they are eighteen in number. One of the major differences between the Mahāpurāṇas and the Upapurāṇas is that the latter are regionally identifiable. It has been claimed that even some of the redactions to the Mahāpurāṇas have a local tinge, but in their entirety none of these texts can be said to have been composed in any particular region. On the other hand, the Upapurāṇas are so overwhelmingly regional in their concern, that they can be identified with a particular locale with a considerable degree of certainty. For my purpose, I have looked into the
four Upapuraṇas, namely the DP, the DBP, the KP and the MBP, which ascribes prominence to the goddesses and upholds the goddess as the Ultimate cosmic principle. R. C. Hazra has worked extensively on the date and provenance of these Purāṇas and his views are most widely accepted.

According to R. C Hazra, the extant DP does not contain the whole of the original Purāṇa. He is of the opinion that changes made in the present DP are largely that of “condensation” and not of “expansion”. Hazra says that the text can not be placed earlier than 500 century A.D., and not later than about 600 century A.D. He adds that “in the present text of the Devi-p, there are chapters (or parts thereof) and verses which were composed much earlier than the sixth century A.D.” Hazra asserts that the text was undoubtedly composed in Bengal.

Hazra places the DBP between 950 to 1200 Century A.D. According to him, the author of the text was a brahmana from Bengal who migrated to Benaras. C. Mackenzie Brown adds that the author(s) of the DBP might have later migrated to Ayodhya from Benaras and this perhaps explains the prominence of the two cities in the text.

According to Hazra, there was an earlier KP which is now lost and the extant KP is different from the original KP. He suggests that the earlier KP should not be dated later than 700 century A.D. The present KP can not be placed before 750 century A.D. and later than 1100 century A.D. Hazra says that the earlier KP was perhaps composed in Bengal. Given the prominence of Kāmarūpa in the extant Purāṇa,
Hazra suggests that this text was composed in Kāmarūpa or in that part of Bengal which was very near to it.\textsuperscript{25}

Hazra is of the opinion that the MEP can not be dated later than the 1100 Century A.D.\textsuperscript{26} He says that the MEP was written in Bengal and most probably in its eastern part which was adjacent to Kāmarūpa.\textsuperscript{27}

**Methodology**

The process of the gradual transformations in the characterisation of the goddess Durgā and the imposition of new values on her have been delineated by looking into the changes in the myths narrated in the Upapurāṇas. Most of the works on Indian mythology have applied the method of structuralist interpretation of the myths or a variation of the same and such studies have significantly contributed to our understanding of cultural patterns which tend to recur in different spatial and temporal zones. In this thesis however, I have looked at the changes in the surface level of the myths and examined how and why even a core myth is replaced by some other core myth. We have no way to ascertain the pre-figuration of a myth in the local culture, as we do not have any written document of the period, except a single set of brahmanical texts. In the initial period of the interaction between brahmanical and local culture(s), it is more likely that the brahmanical authors had to accept some of the general ideas and images which were widely popular among the local people. The myths we find in the Upapurāṇas are already reconfigured by the brahmanical authors, but we have a series
of reconfigurations of the myths and also the introduction of new myths. I have traced the changes in the myths of the goddesses and their functional role in erasing as well as creating cultural norms of the goddesses and through the goddesses.

I have also made a detailed study of the prescriptions of the mode of worshipping different goddesses in general and the celebration of great festival of the goddesses in autumn in particular. A comparative study of the prescriptions of the worship of different goddesses in different Upapurāṇas is made and it is seen how far the myths of the goddesses and the ritual prescriptions are congruent in a particular text. I have also looked into the iconographic details of the goddesses elaborated in the different Upapurāṇas. Mutual overlappings in the iconographic features of the goddesses and the transformations in the iconographic depictions of different goddesses, particularly that of Durgā is traced.

The Rise of Durgā in the Brahmancial Pantheon: The Primary Questions

The scholars dealing with Durgā more or less unanimously agree that in her present form of worship she is primarily a non-Vedic deity. Attempts to trace a Great goddess in the Vedas or even the evolution of the goddess solely from the Vedas is discarded on the ground that the goddesses played a marginal role in the Vedic literature. It is however, recognized that the Vedic mythological deposit was the natural seedbed for the potential development of such a cult. The name of Durgā is never
mentioned in the *Rg Veda*. It has however, been pointed out that the Vedic feminine deities like Aditi, Prthvī, Vāk, Uṣā, Rākā, Sinivali and others bear significant relation to the feasibility of the Great traditional recognition and acceptance of the Durgā archetype.

Durgi is mentioned in the *Taittiriya-Āraṇyaka*, but the goddess as Mahiṣamardinī appears for the first time with all her essentials in the *Mahābhārata* and the *HV*. The two hymns describe Durgā as a virgin deity, sporting on the mountains and inaccessible regions and as the killer of demons, particularly Mahiṣāsura. She is worshipped with meat and wine and sacrifices are offered to her. The process of the synthesis of the non-brahmanic character of the goddess and her brahmanical transfiguration reached its apogee in the *DM*.

Most of the works on Durgā tend to treat her as a pan-Indian archetype, but the worship of Durgā in contemporary Bengal has unique features of her own. The iconographic form of Mahiṣamardinī is being retained, but she is no more only the warrior goddess *per se*. She is worshipped along with her four children, namely Gaṇeśa, Kārtika, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, while her husband Śiva remains in the *cālacītra* (background). In popular belief, daughter Umā/Durgā comes to her mother’s place being granted a leave of five days by her husband Śiva.

The transformations in the depiction of Durgā as the single, autonomous goddess, sporting on the mountain to the worship of the goddess as daughter, wife and mother in modern Bengal, is intriguing in itself. The question naturally arises that what
led to the changes in the characterisation of the goddess and how far such changes were caused by the changes in the social context in which the goddess was/is worshipped. It has been suggested by scholars that the perception of the goddess is not a literal reflection of reality, rather the goddess "embodies the vision of gender relations." Kumkum Roy distinguishes between two kinds of visions of the goddess, one being an intense, personal experience and the other related to "transmission and communication" of the vision. The second category of the vision of the goddess is socially and historically relevant and therefore of greater interest to the historians. Roy summarises the problematic of the gender co-relation between the goddess and women succinctly. She says, "If these representations do not reflect reality, but are none the less embedded in it, then do we view them as contestations of a gender-stratified reality, and as consequently potentially empowering, or are they, as has often been suggested, compensatory, meant to divert attention from grim, routine, existential problems?" Attempts have also been made to look into the question of gender relation between the goddess and human women from the other way round. In order to understand the status of woman in India, the symbolism of the female gender inscribed on the goddesses and mortal women by brahmanism has been explored. Tracy Pintchman's observation echoes the findings of other scholars as well: "The construction and circumscription of female gender in Brahmanical Hinduism applies both to the divine and human levels. The representations of female gender on the divine level provides a symbolic framework that reflects and is reflected in the perception of the female on the human level and the consequent ascription of defined social roles to women." The works focusing on the gender correlation between the goddesses and human women, either from the perspective of the goddesses or mortal women or both,
share a common platform – they study the gender values of the goddesses and mortal women as already well entrenched in the brahmanical patriarchal culture.

In this work, I have approached the problem of the gender construction of the goddess and the mutual overlapping between the goddess and mortal women, taking into consideration the process of brahmanical hegemonisation in Bengal. The Bengal Upapurāṇas offer us a period of transition in the establishment of brahmanical hegemony over the local culture(s) which celebrated the goddess. How far the pre-brahmanical culture(s) of the region was patriarchal may be a contested question, but the meanings and symbolisms of the goddesses in the pre-brahmanical culture(s) need not necessarily be the same as that of the meanings imposed by brahmanism. I have looked into the possible gender roles and functions of the goddess in the pre-brahmanical culture, the ascription of new norms and values on the goddess and the tensions inherent in the process. The construction of the ‘feminine’ in each text is explored and the variations in the depiction of the ‘feminine’ in different texts is located. It is seen how far the goddess conforms to the normative of the ‘feminine’ in a particular text and how far the normative is constructed on or through the goddess herself. The gendered nature of the similarities and disjuncture between the goddess and mortal woman is thus located in the process of contestation and negotiation between the two cultural patterns. I have looked into the interplay of various identities of Durgā as a mother, wife and daughter and examine whether there was/were any shift(s) in the paradigm of motherhood in particular and ‘femininity’ in general. The multivalent significance of the goddess as a religious symbol has been explored and the subtle nuances of her sexual identity and sex roles revealed. I have examined whether
the recognition and veneration of maternity as a divine principle remained a constant feature in the process of the evolution of the goddess and explored the formulation of the tropes that facilitated her acceptance in an overarchingly patriarchal society.

The DM maintains the distinct entity of different goddesses, but fuse their identity into one. In most of the later Purāṇas, we find the exaltation of the Great goddess. Some goddesses are explicitly identified with Mahadevi while others are represented as her partial manifestations. The identification strategy varies from text to text and the persona of the goddess(s) brought into prominence and those identified with each other also vary. For instance, while in some texts the emphasis is on the identification of Durgā with Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī and Kāli, others harp on Durgā’s identity with Umā, Parvatī or Haimavatī. Taking such identification on face value may lead to a straight-jacketed formulation of Durgā’s evolution. In order to understand the vision(s) of Durgā, I shall therefore try to look into the complex web of beliefs, which holds the various goddesses together through myths, symbols and philosophical notions, and also try to locate Durgā as a distinct entity in the same.

The politics of identification also help us to understand how the virgin deity of the Mahābhārata is transformed into Śiva's wife of contemporary Bengal. Discussions on Indian goddesses follow one major gradient — the contrast between goddesses who are conceived as supreme, independent and autonomous, and the goddesses who are conditioned by their relationships with the male counter-parts as their consorts. It has been emphasised that one of the major strategies to accommodate the goddesses within brahmanism is to “control” her through marriage by subordinating her to the husband-
god. Such studies, often view the relationship of the goddesses with their consorts as condensed and static, both spatially and temporally. It is however, difficult to maintain the same for Durgā. I have therefore, located the fluidity of the marital status of Durgā and traced the attempts to subordinate the goddess to the husband-god.

The intricacies of spousification are not only related to the identification of the goddesses, but also to the “split”. It is often held that the association of the goddess with both creation and destruction makes her “ambivalent.” Hence, the goddess is split into the figure of the benign nourishing mother on one hand, and that of the violent, blood-thirsty, erotic goddess on the other. It is however, necessary to see whether the split model is applicable to all goddesses in all regions. I have hereby, examined whether the creative and destructive aspects represent the self-controlled Devī who revels in wholesomeness or they constitute a split of the goddess into the benign and malevolent ones.

It is suggested that the other solution to deal with this ambivalence is to construct the androgyne (Shulman David D. 1980, Brown C.M, 1974). The goddess however, is not androgynous in her bodily form but in her attributes. The underlying assumption is that the pacific and aggressive qualities of the Devī, may be seen as her masculine and feminine traits. The problem with the androgynous model is that it accepts the 'masculine' and 'feminine' as pre-given. I have looked into the construction of the 'masculine' and the 'feminine' at different historical junctures and examined whether the goddess was necessarily androgynous or she created a gender perspective of her own.
In all the chapters, these themes have acted as the continuing thread and I have thus traced the evolution of Durgā by situating her in the goddess matrix of Bengal.


2 Ibid., p.179.


10 Ibid., p.33.


15 Ibid., p.70.

16 Ibid., p.70.

17 Ibid., p.76.

18 Ibid., p.75.

19 Ibid., p.78.

20 Ibid., p.343. Hazra’s placing of the lower date of the DBP is based on his proposition that almost all the chapters of *skandha* 9 of the DBP had been taken from the present *Brahma vaivarta Purāṇa* which cannot be dated earlier than the 10th century A.D. Nirmal S.C. Sanyal and C. Mackenzie Brown are of the opinion that the 9th *skandha* of the DBP was a “late redaction”. For details, see, C. Mackenzie Brown, *The Triumph of the Goddess*, op.cit. pp.219-225. I agree with Sanyal and Brown’s proposition and suggest that the DBP can be dated earlier on the basis of the internal evidence of the *Upapurāṇas*, as worked out in this thesis.

21 Ibid, p.345.

22 Ibid, p.236.

23 Ibid., p.244.

24 Ibid., p.239.


26 Hazra dates the MBP about tenth or eleventh centuries A.D., considering its “silence” about the present KP. Ibid., p.282. Hazra’s position is however, difficult to accept in the light of a number of verses in the MBP, which are exact replica of the verses in the extant KP. If the structuring of the verses are situated in the narrative context, it becomes evident that the verses in the MBP are copied from the KP and it is not the other way round.

27 Ibid., p.277.

29 The verses eulogising the goddess Durgā in the Mahābhārata are believed to be a later interpolation and therefore, relegated to the appendices, in the critical editions. For details, see Mahābhārata Vol.5: The Virātarpavan, Raghu Vira (ed.), Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Poona, 1947, Appendix 1.1.

30 The verses hailing the goddess are scattered in the HV in book II, Chapter 2-4 and 22 in Panchanan Tarkaratna (ed.), Vangabasi Pres, Calcutta, 1312, Bangabda, but included in the appendices in the critical editions.


32 Ibid., p.37.

33 Ibid., p.37.

34 Tracy Pintchman, “The Ambiguous Female: Conceptions of Female Gender in the Brahmanical Tradition and the Roles of Women in India” in Smart, Ninian and Shibesh Thakur (eds.), Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1993, pp. 144-159.