Recently, Bengalis made world headlines as they fought through another major crisis in their existence. In the past generation their hard times have been extraordinary: a terrible famine, communal slaughter around the time of partition, periodic flows of refugees across the border of divided Bengal, a great tidal-wave disaster, communist-anarchist violence, brutal military suppression in 1971 by the Pakistani government, from which the people of eastern Bengal had become estranged, followed by a war for independence.

Following such turmoil, it seems but a small matter to offer a work of history. But the efforts of the Pakistan military to thwart Bengali culture and to kill some of its most creative exponents have shown how fragile culture is. Therefore, it has become even more important today for scholars, both South Asian and foreign, to continue to chart the history of Bengal. This work traces some developments in the nationalist period which help one to understand the complexity of the present.

Under British rule in India, Bengalis, for the first time in their history, were at the center of an all India empire. Some high-caste Hindu Bengalis and a few Muslims quickly took to Western education and participated in the British Raj. The most politically conscious among them helped to found, lead, and sustain the nationalist movement during its first quarter century. Their centrality and early start led Bengali spokesmen in the
later nineteenth century to develop a grandiose view of the role of Bengalis in Indian life relative to other regional groups. The cultural awakening, particularly of Hindu Bengal, the political activity, and even the land revenue settlement of Bengal were offered as models by Bengal to other regions.

Because the capital of British India until 1912 was Calcutta, Bengali leaders found the levers of power at hand and were able to convert regional and local issues into national ones. This process culminated during the Swadeshi agitation in the early twentieth century, when nationalist leaders from other regions joined Bengali nationalists in making the revocation of the partition of Bengal a general concern. During the Swadeshi years, Bengal was the cynosure of Indian politics, and Bengali leaders claimed that in spirit and in organization they were setting an example for other Indians to emulate. The agitation failed to sustain itself and did not lead to the building of successful parallel institutions outside the scope of the British Raj. This failure and the shift of India's capital to Delhi contributed to the loss of Bengali preeminence. The Bengali model lost its glow.

After World War I, Mahatma Gandhi and a corps of leaders selected by him, few of them Bengalis, took command of the Indian National Congress. The foremost political leaders from earlier dominant Bengal and Maharashtra usually were secondary figures in nationalist politics for the next generation. Two major revolts against the Gandhian nationalist leadership received strong support in Bengal. The first was the creation of the Swaraj Party in the 1920s, led by the Bengali Chittaranjan Das. The second was the challenge of the left in the 1930s, led by another Bengali, Subhas Chandra Bose.

The ultimate frustration of these attempts to break Gandhian supremacy, together with the failure of Hindu-Muslim alliances in Bengal, has contributed to the strong resentment against the national government still harbored by Bengalis in post-1947 West Bengal. The antagonism of Bengalis in the eastern half of
the region against their national government culminated in an independent Bangladesh and grew out of a different but related history which also involves differences between Hindu and Muslim Bengalis. The declining role of Hindu Bengalis in Indian nationalist politics and their consequent revolts are major themes of the present work. The equally important but neglected history of Bengali Muslims before 1947 is a minor theme here but the focus of future research.

This book traces the changing place of Bengal and the growth of nationalism over three generations from the 1870s to 1940. I have concentrated on types of leadership and political organization, ideology and political strategy, case studies of leadership, and Bengali self-imagery. In most instances, I have not worked quantitatively. Rather, the study emerges in a more qualitative manner from strong impressions gained during immersion in many of the relevant sources.

My primary foci have been the Indian National Congress, its Bengal branch, the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee, and a small number of nationalist leaders whose careers have been examined in detail. The Congress was the leading nationalist organization and provided continuity for the movement as older leaders left and new ones came to the fore. Although it was a relatively small body through the first two nationalist generations and did not take practical steps toward becoming a mass organization until the 1920s, the Congress was recognized by the government of India from its inception as a most significant source of “native opinion.” The Congress included under its umbrella a number of competing factions, and conflicts between differing ideologies, personalities, regional interests, and strategies were acted out within it. In the Congress arena we can see the changing role played by Bengalis and compare their actual part in it with their image of themselves and what they think their role should be.

To make my study more concrete and hopefully more vivid,
I have analyzed the life histories of a few Bengal leaders with some thoroughness. These men were chosen either because they played a large role in politics or because they had significant influence on the shaping of nationalist ideology. They were men of national as well as regional distinction, concerned with the problems arising from the fact that they were conscious of both a European and an Indian inheritance. They all tried to deal with this dual cultural tradition within themselves and their country. Of course, many Indians had to face similar problems; the Bengalis upon whom I have concentrated were among the few to whom other Indians looked for example and advice in dealing with the problems of conflicting values, legacies, and hopes. A number of psychological themes arose in studying these leaders, including the expression of aggression and ambivalence toward authority.

I have examined the different roles which each figure played and saw himself playing. The concept of role provides a useful link between organization and individual career. In this period we see the movement from amateur to professional politics worked out, inter alia, in the lives of these men. I have also examined the ideas these leaders formulated and spread, particularly their ideas about India and Bengal, and the past, present, and future of their country and region. An analysis of these ideas provides an understanding of what they saw as valuable in their own heritage, and what they meant by the Indian nation and by the Bengalis. Descriptions of Bengal and prescriptions for Bengalis, which I have called Bengali self-imagery, give a sense of the part they thought Bengalis should play in Indian life and is related to the contributions they actually did make. I have tried to compare the answers given by the leaders of the three nationalist generations as to the place of Bengal. As with other generational comparisons, I was looking for continuities and discontinuities which would give insight into the changing place of Bengal. The scrutiny of ideas and of the earthier workings of
parties enables us to see how ideas function in politics. And it returns us to the major theme: changing problems and styles of leadership in declining and developing Bengal.

This study of Bengal and of Indian nationalism is the revised version of a doctoral dissertation submitted to the Department of History at Harvard University. Much of my work on Indian history was done at the University of Chicago, where I studied and later interned in the Indian Civilization Program. Professors Daniel H. H. Ingalls, Michael Brecher, Philip Calkins, Bernard S. Cohn, Dennis Dalton, Edward C. Dimock, Jr., Ainslie Embree, Warren Gunderson, H. J. Hanham, Stephen Hay, Ronald B. Inden, Richard L. Park, Edward Shils, Milton Singer, and the late David Owen read through parts of this manuscript at different stages of its preparation and offered useful criticisms and suggestions.

My research in India, supported by the Foreign Area Fellowship Program, was carried out mainly at the Netaji Research Bureau and National Library of India, Calcutta, the Indian Renaissance Institute, Dehradun, the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, and the National Archives of India, New Delhi, and I am grateful to those in charge of these research facilities for their generous assistance. I would like to thank friends, associates, and relations of several of the leaders discussed here for patiently answering my questions.

My friends in India accepted me warmly into their company and society and thus enabled me to live and study there. In particular, I would like to thank Professor and Mrs. Sushabhan Sarkar and Miss Shipra Sarkar, Dr. and Mrs. Sisir Bose, Mr. and Mrs. Nirad C. Chaudhuri, Professor and Mrs. P. Lal, Mr. and Mrs. Abu Sayeed Ayyub, Mr. Bishnu Dey, Dr. and Mrs. M. K. Halder, Mr. Pradip Sen, Mr. Satyajit Ray, Mr. Anil Basu, Dr. and Mrs. Naresh Guha, the K. C. Chopra family of Bombay and New Delhi, the Sindhwani family of Dehradun, Mr. Keshub C. Sarkar, and the late David McCutchion and Jamini Roy. In addition, I bene-
fited from discussions with Dr. and Mrs. J. K. Banerjee in Lon-
don and talks with Frau Emilie Schenkl-Bose and her daughter
Anita in Vienna.

Miss Judith Aronson helped me to revise the manuscript and
Mrs. Mary Flower retyped it. Miss Karen Mitchell, my meticulous
editor at Columbia University Press, has made every effort to
tighten my writing style and avoid vagueness on crucial points.
My mother, Mrs. Rose Gordon, and Miss Carol Meadows de-
voted many hours to reading the proofs. The Southern
Asian Institute at Columbia University supported a summer's
work of rewriting the original text.

My mother and my aunt, Mrs. Regina Berman, helped with my
investigation of M. N. Roy's Mexican years. Finally I would like
to express my love and appreciation to my two families-away-
from-home: the Dimocks of Chicago and Calcutta, and the Dattas
of Calcutta, Chicago, and West Branch, Iowa; and to my family
at home as well.