PREFACE

"Selecting the major theme for your first work of scholarship is like selecting a wife," Stephen N. Hay once cautioned me while I was under his guidance at the University of Chicago. He added, "in either case, the better the choice, the more enduring and fruitful the relationship." As early as 1958, while still a graduate student at Chicago, I had made my choice, and the results of the first nine years of "marriage" with the Bengal renaissance are contained in the pages of this book.

In retrospect, I should say that I chose the topic because I believed that an exhaustive treatment of it, with reasonable objectivity, would at least partly answer two central questions in modern Indian history. As a rule, the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century is treated within the context of cultural continuity and change under British colonialism. Therefore, the historiography of that renaissance is divided between the advocates of British "impact" and the advocates of Indian "response." If British influence is considered paramount, then the writer stresses change and regards the renaissance as a form of Westernization or modernization. If, on the other hand, Indian response is stressed, then the focus is on the Indian heritage, and the renaissance is viewed as a reinterpretation of tradition. Not infrequently, scholars have looked upon the phenomenon as a synthesis between "East and West."

If a study of the Bengal renaissance should tell us something vital about the continuing problem of tradition versus modernity in India, it should also reveal to us something equally significant about the origins of nationalism there. Indeed, as several writers have intimated, renaissance and nationalism are so closely related in India that it is often difficult to distinguish one from the other. For example, do we characterize the new sense of community (in Hindu India) based on language, religion, customs, manners, literature, and

history as renaissance or as nationalism? Is renaissance simply a misnomer for the prepoliticized stage of cultural nationalism? Finally, just as in the case of renaissance and cultural change, we are compelled to raise the complex question of the relationship between nationalism and modernity. Which is the more fitting framework for such analysis: Westernization or the reinterpretation of tradition?

It was thanks to many individuals at the University of Chicago that I gained the orientation which first prompted me to ask these and other such questions. Stephen Hay introduced me to the problem of tradition and modernity in nineteenth century Bengal. I am greatly indebted to Edward Dimock for his having shared with me his understanding and appreciation of the uniqueness of Bengali language and literature. Milton Singer imparted a deep understanding of cultural relativity and the conviction that cultural anthropologists can profit as much from historical perspective as cultural historians can profit from applying anthropology to the past. Others in the stimulating Chicago atmosphere, notably Edward Shils and Daniel Borstin, led me to the belief that intellectual history is not a study of the intrinsic evolution of ideas but of the sociology of knowledge. I am grateful also to the comparativists among the South Asianists and historians at Chicago who widened horizons for me in helping me to see the Bengal renaissance in sweeping perspective. I am profoundly grateful to the Ford Foundation for a Foreign Area Training Fellowship which made possible two years of research in India and England, and to the Research Council of the University of Missouri for its financial assistance in the preparation of my manuscript for publication.

Above all, I should like to express my appreciation to the librarians who graciously offered their specialized knowledge and the use of special collections. Data on the College of Fort William were derived largely from a well-preserved collection of Council Proceedings at the National Archives in New Delhi. Much of the material for reconstructing the history of Orientalism in India came from collections in the Asiatic Society of Bengal, the Sanskrit College Archives, and the West Bengal Record Office—all three in Calcutta. Information about missionary activity in Bengal was obtained from both the Baptist Mission Archives in London and the William Carey Library in Serampore. The portrayal of the Bengali intelligentsia was derived from a wide variety of sources gathered together mostly from Calcutta libraries such as the National Library

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and the Bangiya Sahitya Academy. Numerous administrative records, newspaper files and contemporary tracts at the India Office Library were invaluable assets to me in gaining an understanding of the British side of the cultural encounter with India.

I should also like to thank others who have read the manuscript at various stages of its development and offered me advice on how I could improve the book. For their constructive criticism, I am much indebted to my wife, to Robert Crane of Duke University, to Ainslee Embree of Columbia University, to Roderick McGrew of the University of Missouri, and to Richard Adloff of the University of California Press.

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