The story of Dwarkanath Tagore first came to my attention in a seminar conducted by Richard Park at Berkeley twenty years ago. I was intrigued by the discovery that the grandfather of the poet Rabindranath and the father of the saintly Debendranath was an astute business tycoon who owned fleets of ships, coal mines, insurance companies, banks, and indigo plantations. At once I sensed the likelihood of a dramatic conflict between the worldly father and his other-worldly son and imagined Dwarkanath’s profound disappointment when Debendranath refused to carry on the hard-won business empire. In this case research confirmed my guess. On another point, however, I was proven wrong. I had anticipated that the adulatory historians of the Tagore family had exaggerated Dwarkanath’s achievements, and I was surprised to discover that he was all they had said and more. In a British-dominated business world, a Bengali Brahmin indeed stood at the pinnacle of power.

My research was supported by generous grants from the American Institute of Indian Studies, the American Philosophical Society, and, at the University of Illinois, by the Center for International Comparative Studies, the Graduate College Research Board, the Department of History, and the Center for Asian Studies.

In India, I could not have proceeded without the help of my cherished friend, Professor Gautam Chattopadhyay. Other friends and colleagues who were generous in their aid were Samaren Roy, Professor Panchanan Saha, M.K. Chaudhuri, Tarun Mittra, K.L. Mukhopadhyay, Amritamaya Mookerji, Tridib Ghose, and Professor N. Majumdar. Those who helped me in an official capacity included Hiranmay Banerjee, Vice Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University; S.N. Bhomik, Rabindra Bharati Museum; J.C. Goswami, Keeper of the Records, and T.K. Mukherjee, Assistant Director of Archives, West Bengal State Archives; Y.M. Mulay, Librarian, and
Chittaranjan Banerji, Deputy Librarian, National Library of India; S.R. Das, Vice Chancellor, and H.C. Bhattacharyya, Registrar, Visva-Bharati University; Sovan Lal Ganguly, Curator, Rabindra Sadhana; S.V. Desika Char and Sourin Roy of the National Archives of India; A.D. Ogilvie, B. Mitter and W.J. Jameson of Andrew Yule and Company; S.K. Banerjee, Registrar, Calcutta High Court, and the staff of the High Court Archives; W.D. Bryden, Secretary of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce; and G.B. Ghosh, Geological Survey of India.

In England, S.C. Sutton and his efficient staff at the India Office Library were especially helpful. I also wish to thank the staffs of the numerous other libraries and archives at which I worked in Britain for their courteous assistance.

I am especially grateful to Professors K.N. Chaudhuri of S.O.A.S., John B. McLane of Northwestern University, and John H. Broomfield of the University of Michigan, as well as to my colleagues at the University of Illinois—Charles Hall and Professors Lloyd Eastman and Koji Taira—for reading all or part of the manuscript and suggesting improvements. I am also indebted to those who as students helped me in the research—David Schob, Robert Neiss, Sultana Krippendorf and Nancy Peshkin.

For their patience during the long gestation period I want to thank my children, Joanna and William; and, for her relentless prodding, my mother. Finally, I am eternally grateful to my wife, Julia, for her help and inspiration.