PARTNER IN EMPIRE

Dwarkanath Tagore and the Age of Enterprise in Eastern India

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Chapter I
THE HOME AND THE WORLD

Two major influences shaped the character of Dwarkanath Tagore: one was his family and the other his friend and "guru," Rammohan Roy. The Tagore family emerged from obscurity at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when it migrated from Jessore to the newly founded British settlement at Calcutta. As priests the Tagores earned their livelihood ministering to the lowly fishermen of Govindapore, one of the fever-haunted villages scattered in the swamp near the British fort. The poor fishermen, who could induce only degraded Brahmins to serve their ritual needs, were so pleased to have priests that they honored them with the title Haddu, meaning "lord." During the eighteenth century, Calcutta grew rapidly into the leading port of south Asia, and the first settlers prospered with the city. The men of the Tagore family gave up their priestly role to serve as commercial agents for the East India Company and amassed a fortune providing supplies to the commissariat at Fort William and to captains of merchantmen anchored in the river. They invested their money in land, first within the rapidly growing city, then, toward the end of the century, in rural estates acquired from a declining aristocracy.

During the nineteenth century these descendants of humble priests would themselves become aristocrats—the "Medici" of Calcutta, the most gifted and versatile of families; civic leaders, philanthropists, merchant princes, patrons of the arts, prophets and theologians, musicians, artists, and poets.  


The Tagores were similar to a score of Bengali families that rose to wealth and prominence in eighteenth-century Calcutta. In two respects, however, they differed. The first was the intensity of their drive for achievement and status within Bengali society; and the second, their fondness for things novel and fashionable, especially when these were European. Dwarkanath once attributed their extraordinary energy and ambition to a "sense of injury" resulting from the "separation . . . between my family and the more bigoted classes of my countrymen." 2 The Tagores belonged to a degraded Brahmin subcaste called "Pirali Brahmin," and, although in the secular world of the frontier metropolis they could rise to the highest level of power and influence, in the Brahmanic world of social stratification based on pollution and pedigree they were irredeemable pariahs. They met the challenge in two ways: at times they rejected Hindu tradition and adopted European manners and values; at other times they tried to prove their caste legitimacy by hyperorthodox behavior.

Orthodox Hindu social leaders rigorously enforced the ostracism of the Piralis. In the late eighteenth century, a Brahmin who had done nothing more than take a meal with a Pirali had to donate fifty thousand rupees to his priests to be readmitted into his own caste. Another Brahmin who unwittingly had married his daughter to a Pirali was abandoned by his friends and died of grief; and a Kayastha, in status slightly lower than a Brahmin, spent thousands of rupees to be restored to his caste after marrying a Pirali girl. Many Piralis, including some of the Tagores, tried unsuccessfully to buy their way into society with huge sums of money. 3 As late as the mid-nineteenth century, the Tagores, in spite of their immense wealth and prestige, could not break the caste barrier; and when, in 1852, the nephew of a leading Kulin Brahmin married the grand-daughter of Dwarkanath, the boy was expelled from his family. A contemporary noted that "any child married into any of the Tagore families loses from the moment of his union the privileges of the society of which his relatives are members. He holds as much an isolated position as a Hindu convert, and entails on the head of his new connections the necessity of maintaining him and his progeny." 4

4 Bengali Darpan, 6 May 1852.
The story of the way in which the ancestors of the Tagores fell from a state of purity exists in a number of versions, all of which involve association with the Muslim rulers of Bengal. According to their family traditions, they had been high-ranking orthodox Kulin Brahmins until the fifteenth century, when one Purushottama brought lasting disgrace upon his family. Some say he lost caste status because, in the course of attending a feast given by a Muslim official, Pir Ali Khan, he was tricked into inhaling the forbidden aroma of cooking beef. In another version, Purushottama lost caste when he rashly entered into a love match with a beautiful daughter from a family of Brahmins who had been converted to Islam.5

A more plausible account is given in the Chaitanyamangala of Jayananda, composed in the sixteenth century. Husain Shah, ruler of Gaur at the turn of the sixteenth century, was told that the Brahmins of Navadvipa were arming to overthrow his rule. He looted their property, desecrated their shrines, and forced those in the nearby village of Pirulya to take water from the hands of Muslims. Thereafter the Pirulya (or Pirali) Brahmins were considered polluted and unfit for marriage into other Brahmin families.6 Still another explanation is that the ancestors of the Tagores were among those Brahmins employed by the Muslims as tax collectors and became unpopular with their fellow Brahmins either for implementing harsh revenue assessments or associating too freely with Muslims.7 Whatever the origin of their degradation, the descendants of Purushottama were estranged from Brahmin society, subjected to insults, and hounded from place to place. They had great difficulty marrying off their daughters and could serve as priests only to low castes that other Brahmins would not serve.

But the Tagores refused to accept an inferior status, and when an opportunity appeared to improve their position, they seized it. The first Tagore to emerge from legend into history was Panchanan, the great-grandfather of Dwarkanath. Toward the end of the seventeenth century he left the ancestral home at Narendrapur in Jessore and migrated to Govindapore. Panchanan was alert to economic opportunities, and at the turn of the eighteenth century he and his family began serving the Europeans as bannis or compra-

5Brief Account of the Tagore Family.
7Bhattacharya, Hindu Castes, pp. 121-22.
9Nilmony's name is included in a list of forty Indian names as tax farmers for the East India Company's parganas in 1767. WBBA, Proceedings of the Select Committee, Fort William, 8 Nov. (347-50) 1766.
Debi, who bore him two sons: the first was Radhanath; the second, born in 1794, was Dwarkanath. Soon after Dwarkanath's birth, Menaka Debi died and Rammoni took a second wife, Durga Moni, who gave him a third son, Ramanath. Meanwhile, Dwarkanath's uncle, Ramlochan, now head of the Jorasanko branch of the family, had married Aloka Sundari, a sister of Dwarkanath's mother. Because they were childless, Ramlochan and Aloka Sundari were allowed to adopt Dwarkanath as their own in 1799. Thus Dwarkanath was raised by his father's elder brother and his mother's sister with the economic advantages of an only son. Ramlochan provided his adopted son with the schooling customary for an upper-class, western-oriented Hindu. Dwarkanath learned his Bengali letters at a pathshala and received an elementary English education at Mr. Sherbourne's, one of a score of small English-medium schools run by Eurasians that catered to upper-class Hindu boys.10 In 1807, when Dwarkanath was only thirteen years of age, Ramlochan died and left Aloka Sundari, Dwarkanath, and his natural father, Rammoni, to carry on the household at Jorasanko.11 To Dwarkanath he bequeathed a substantial inheritance—estates in Orissa, which Ramlochan and his two brothers owned jointly, urban property in Calcutta, and, most important, a large zamindari called Berhampore situated in Jessore and Pahla districts, all held in trust by his stepmother.12 At eighteen, Dwarkanath came into his property and, following the family custom, married a girl from the Pirali community of Jessore. The girl was Digambari, the daughter of Prawn Nauth Roy Chowdry of Narendrapur.13 Dwarkanath's marriage—that of a worldly exethe with an orthodox, pious woman—would parallel the marriage of Ramlochan and Aloka Sundari. Although of opposite temperaments, Ramlochan and Aloka Sundari each left an imprint on the character of Dwarkanath. Ramlochan was the most financially successful of the brothers, a dashing man of fashion who patronized poets, musicians, and singers and set

10Kisorey Chunder Mitra, memoir, p. 5.
12The will of Ramlochan was collected by Americraya Mukherjee and published in Sanskriti, Pish 1365 (December/January 1958–59), pp. 549–90.
the standards of contemporary taste among the more urbane Calcuttans. 14 Aloka Sundari, who survived her husband by thirty years, was a devout Vaisnavite who staged festivals at Jorasanko and went on pilgrimages to the Vaisnavite shrines at Puri and Brindaban. According to her grandson, however, "there was a certain freedom of mind in her, together with her blind faith in religion." 15 Dwarkanath appears to have acquired from her some of his liberal religious and social attitudes—his preference for simple garb during worship, his democratic personal relationships, and his advocacy of the emancipation of women. During her last illness, when she was taken to the Ganges to die, Dwarkanath, her favorite, was on a trip upcountry. "If Dwarkanath had been at home," she complained, "you would never have been able to carry me away." 16 At her sradha or funeral ceremony, Dwarkanath, as was the custom, distributed alms to fifty or sixty thousand people. 17

Beyond Jorasanko, Dwarkanath's life was shaped by his kinship in the larger Tagore parish or extended family. The Tagores were the most open-minded, free-spirited, and venturesome of the great Calcuta families; and many of the new paths Dwarkanath was to follow had been broken earlier by his elders and ancestors. While Dwarkanath was still a child his kinsmen had formed business partnerships with Britishers, supported liberal causes, adopted elements of western culture, entertained Europeans in their homes, and associated with social reformers. The Tagores had been divided into two households since the 1760s, but in matters affecting family honor, social status, and to some extent, economic well-being, the parihar

15Ibid., p. 3. There may have been some relationship between the Tagores and three of the six Gravastins who became the leading Vaisnavite theologians in the sixteenth century. The three were pīṭha Brahmans who at one time had been converted to Islam or had somehow lost caste through association with the Muslims. See Edward C. Dimock, Jr., "Doctrines and Practices among the Vaisnavas of Bengal," in Milton Singer, ed., Krishna: Myths, Roles, and Attitudes (Tokyo: 1966), pp. 44, 219-20, no. 17. The Tagores of Jorasanko practiced Vaisnavism; those at Patharighatta were Saivites.
16Sasmita Jha, Journal (London), Vol. 26, August 1838, p. 216. Both the Calcutta Censor of 21 Mar. 1838 and the Bengal Reformer of 15 Mar. 1838 mention the death of Dwarkanath's mother in 1838. Debendranath, however, wrote that his "Didima" died in 1757 (Satyajit Bandyopadhyay, which corresponds to the year 1835, and, according to Satichandra Chakravarty's notes in the Bengali edition, "Didima" refers to Aloka Sundari. See Autobiography of Mahesh Chandra Dey, p. 2; also Satichandra Chakravarty ed., The Home and the World, 17

acted together under the leadership of the eldest of the senior branch. In Dwarkanath's youth, the family head was Gopi Mohun, the eldest son of Darpa Narayan. Gopi Mohun was not only the head of the Tagore family but also the dalapati or leader of the Tagore "party" or dal, which included families from other castes who looked to the Tagores for patronage and leadership. At Patharighatta the dalapati held court to settle questions within the family regarding ritual observances, marriage, property, and social behavior. 18

Gopi Mohun was a highly educated man, conversant in English, French, Persian, and Sanskrit, and prominent among the founders of Hindu College. 19 He had been banian to Edward Wheler, a member of Warren Hastings's council, and, like his father Darpa Narayan, served as banian to the French at Chandernagore and added extensive estates to his inheritance. An orthodox Hindu, generous with pandits, and a builder of temples to Siva and Kali, he was also a personal friend of Joseph Barretto and other European merchants and was one of the small number of Hindus who invited foreigners into their homes. 20 He was tolerant of new ideas and may have counted himself as one of the friends of the notorious iconoclast, Rammohun Roy. 21 Possibly he attended the meetings of the Atmiya Sabha (Friendly Society) formed by Rammohun Roy in 1815 and may have taken along his youngest son, Prasanna Kumar, then fourteen years of age. Because the way had been cleared by the dalapati, Dwarka- nath too would have been free to attend the meetings.

When Gopi Mohun died in 1818 his brother, Hari Mohun Tagore, became family head. Hari Mohun was drawn of the Export Warehouse, one of the higher government posts an Indian could hold.

191833, when his house burnt down, it was reported that among the articles lost was his library of over 3,000 volumes. Indian Gazeteer, 15 May 1833.
21Gopi Mohun is mentioned as an early supporter of Rammohun Roy, but the evidence is not conclusive. He is listed among the "Friends and Well-wishers of Rammohun" by Rammatha Nabh Ghosh, in app. D of Satichandra Chakravarty ed., Father of Modern India, p. 176. Ghosh notes that Gopi Mohun was a patron of Kali Mira, a musician who also gave lessons to Rammohun Roy and whose songs "strengthened him in his fight against idolatry."
Bishop Heber, who once visited him in his country villa, remarked on the “decidedly European” character of his house, furnishings, and carriages. “He is a fine old man, who speaks English well, is well informed on most topics of general discussion and talks with the appearance of much familiarity on Franklin, chemistry, natural philosophy, etc.”22 Unlike Gopi Mohun, however, he had no patience for Rammohan Roy’s attacks on Hindu orthodoxy, and in 1822 he joined with Radha Kant Deb in proposing a vote of thanks to Lord Hastings for his protection of sati.23

When Dwarkanath and his cousin Prasanna Kumar defied the dalapati and opted for the camp of Rammohan Roy, they created a new breach in the paribar which cut across the old one between Jorasanko and Pathuriaghata. The young renegades were not yet important enough to polarize the entire family, but in time their combined wealth and power would equal that of the orthodox party within the family and they would form their own dal in opposition to that of Hara Kumar, successor to Hari Mohun as Tagore dalapati. The lines were drawn by 1823 when Hari Mohun’s son, Umananda (also known as Nandalal) directed the preparation of two tracts, the first attacking Rammohan Roy and the second aimed in all likelihood at Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar. The latter referred to “certain well known persons, fallen into bad company because of youth, wealth, power and thoughtlessness, [who] throw off fear of religion and of public opinion, cut their tuft of hair, drink wine and consort with Muhammadan women.”24

Some of the other Tagores were won over to reformism in whole or in part. Chandra Kumar, the second son of Gopi Mohun, took up a position somewhere between those of Rammohan and Hara Kumar. He avoided the issue of sati but joined Rammohan, Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar in a petition against the press regulations, was later involved in the agitation against the Stamp Act, signed the petition favoring European settlement in India, and supported the movement for jury trial. Another cousin, Shamal, participated in the anti-sati movement and, in 1831, together with Prasanna Kumar and

22Quoted in Farrell, Tagore Family, p. 153.
speculations and in law suits against Alexander and Company and Barreto and Sons. In 1829 the surviving brothers divided up the family property and liabilities and by the time Prasanna Kumar and Hara Kumar had recouped their losses and become wealthy men, Dwarkanath had made his own fortune. It was not capital but intangible assets that Dwarkanath acquired from his Pathuriaghatta relatives: the family name and reputation, the business traditions, and the Tagore life style. The family molded his fundamental attitudes and values—his refined tastes, cosmopolitan outlook, and receptivity to new ideas. Nevertheless, in both business and public life, Dwarkanath transcended his family. His idealism, breadth of vision, and contribution to his country must be attributed largely to the influence of one outside the family—Rammohun Roy.

When he settled in Calcutta in 1815, Rammohun Roy at 43 was a full generation older than Dwarkanath. Although he had spent most of his life in the mofussal, accumulating a modest fortune in moneylending and land speculation, he was already well-known in Calcutta where his religious views had antagonized both Hindus and Muslims, whose sacred beliefs he attacked as irrational and superstitious. A few years later he would antagonize Christians too by ridiculing the concept of the Trinity. Even the sympathetic orientalist H.H. Wilson would describe his views as unreasonable and immoderate. 32

Concrete evidence of the early association of Rammohun and Dwarkanath is sketchy. Dwarkanath may have attended the meetings of Rammohun Roy’s Amtiya Sabha, for a newspaper report notes that a Sabha meeting in 1819 was attended by some members of the family, most eminent for wealth or learning amongst the Hindu inhabitants, but we regret that we are not enabled to mention their names.” 33 If the worldly young Dwarkanath did attend the meetings,

31 The Great Tagores Will Care (Calcutta: 1872), p. 1. Eventually the Tagores of Pathuriaghatta became the wealthy branch and the Tagores of Jorasanko relatively modest in means. The chief reason for this was that Hara Kumar’s property was eventually divided among the fourteen children of Debendranath.
34 A writer claims that Dwarkanath was at first an invaluable foe of Rammohun Roy. Fisher’s Colonial Magazine (London), August-December 1842, 1, 393-99.
37 Perhaps the earliest concrete surviving evidence of an association between Rammohun and Dwarkanath is a letter from John Digby, Rammohun’s old employer, to the Board of Revenue, dated 16 Nov. 1822. Digby had nominated a nephew of Rammohun to the post of Babarre Training (Excise-tax collector) of the Burdwan collectorship and wrote that “Dwarkanath Tahir who is possessed of considerable landed property has offered himself as security” for the young man. See R. Chandra and Jitendra Kumar Majumdar, Selections from Official Letters and Documents relating to the Life of Raja Rammohun Roy, vol. I, 1791-1830 (Calcutta: 1938), p. 319. Politically, the first association between Rammohun and Dwarkanath may have been a petition to the Supreme Court dated 18 Mar. 1823, protesting the Press Regulation. Twelve years later, Dwarkanath reminded: “When this regulation was first promulgated, I with three of my own relations and my lamented friend the late Rammohun Roy were the only persons who petitioned the Supreme Court against it.” Quoted in Kurnar Chandra Mitra, Memoirs, p. 45. In fact, the signers also included Gaur Charan Banerjee, a brother of orthodox priest leader Radhanath Banerjee, and Hunchander Ghose. See Collet, Raja Rammohun Roy, p. 429.

he probably had less interest in the readings from the Upanishads than in the strange maverick who conducted the meetings. 34

Dwarkanath was not faced with the need to commit himself fully to the camp of Rammohun Roy until 1813. In that year Rammohun launched his campaign against the “evils and disgrace” of sati by publishing two pamphlets, one in Bengali and one in English. 35 These “produced a commotion in Calcutta Hindu society” and brought forth a reply from the conservative intelligentsia and counter-reply from Rammohun. 36 The polarization of Hindu society intensified in the 1820s and reached its climax in 1830 with the formation of the Dharma Sabha, organized by the conservatives to defend sati. Sati, above all issues, became the cause that divided the friends from the opponents of Rammohun Roy, and if Dwarkanath and his kinsman Prasanna Kumar Tagore had been vacillating, they were now forced to choose their camp and to separate themselves from the elders of the Tagore family. 37

For a short period in the 1820s the two young Tagores even experimented with Christianity. In 1821, Rammohun Roy and the Reverend William Adams, formerly a Baptist missionary, gathered together a small group of friends and formed the Calcutta Unitarian Committee. There is no list of the original members, but in 1827 the
members included Theodore Dickens, a Barrister of the Supreme Court; George James Gordon, a merchant of the firm of Mackintosh and Company; William Tate, an attorney; B.W. Macleod, a surgeon in the company’s service; Norman Kerr, an unconverted servant of the company; Rammohun Roy; Dwarkanath Tagore; Prasanna Kumar Tagore; Radha Prasad Roy (eldest son of Rammohun); and William Adam. Among the Britishers, George James Gordon and Theodore Dickens would remain lifelong friends of Dwarkanath.

Rammohun disbanded the Unitarian Committee in 1828 and replaced it with the Brahmo Samaj, composed exclusively of Indians. Dwarkanath emerged as the second in command, and after Rammohun departed for Europe in 1830 he assumed leadership of the Brahmo Samaj and the reforming party. Although proud to associate his name with that of Rammohun in social and political movements, Dwarkanath was less than enthusiastic about carrying on his iconoclastic religious ideas.

Dwarkanath’s deepest religious convictions were Vaishnavite, with which he became imbued during his childhood at Jorasanko. His son Debendranath asserted that he had been “a staunch believer in the popular religion of the country,” and that although Rammohun Roy undermined his faith in Hindu practices, “he never became thoroughly posted in the truths of theism as preached by Raja Rammohun Roy.” Throughout his life, Dwarkanath continued to perform puja to the family idols, but during Rammohun’s lifetime, deference to his teacher took precedence over conventional worship. Debendranath recalled that whenever Rammohun approached Jorasanko, Dwarkanath would interrupt his daily puja to receive his friend and teacher. He attended Brahmo services and perhaps for a time even accepted Rammohun’s theism, but he insisted on worshipping God in his own fashion. He alone would come to Brahmo prayer meetings informally attired, and once, when taken to task for his alleged disrespect for God, replied, “Having to spend the whole day in my office dress, I cannot again put myself to the trouble and inconvenience of using it in the evenings, especially when we have come to worship God, to whom we should always appear in the simplest and humblest garb.” The anecdote reveals a view of the separation of secular and sacred quite different from that held by

38Cullen, Raja Rammohun Roy, p. 131a.
40Chakravarty, ed., Father of Modern India, pt. II, pp. 175-76.

Rammohun. Rammohun believed that God was man’s king and master and in going to His court, one must dress himself properly and must appear before Him as one fit to be present at the court of the Prince of Princes. Dwarkanath associated wealth, luxury, and elegance with the secular world and with objects that could be assigned a price and that men could manipulate. The sacred he associated with humility, poverty, and simplicity.

Because he lacked Rammohun’s zeal for religious reform, Dwarkanath was able to serve as a bridge between the Brahmos and the orthodox community. He and Prasanna Kumar joined the conservative leaders in the Gaudiya Samaj (Bengali Society) formed in 1823 to promote the Bengali language, defend Bengali culture against the attacks of the missionaries, and save the youth from the corrupt moral influence of both Christian and rationalist education. In 1833, when the European business community appealed to the government to reduce the number of Hindu holidays observed in public offices, Dwarkanath joined his Hindu brethren to protest religious discrimination. In the following year the chief magistrate of Calcutta issued orders prohibiting religious singing processions in the city streets. Dwarkanath and Radha Kant Deb, leader of the conservative society, united in opposition, and the order was rescinded.

In his religious behavior, Dwarkanath was governed largely by a sense of propriety. He would follow the customs and traditions of his ancestors so long as they were not disgraceful or degrading to his self-respect. Much of what he did was done with an eye toward the reaction of the European community, for he craved their approval just as his orthodox kinsmen looked for approval to the Hindu caste leaders. Thus, while indifferent to theological reform, he was passionate in his support for the outlawing of sati. Most of his European associates saw it as a cruel, barbaric rite and questioned whether any nation that practiced it could be truly civilized. To a Bengali in daily contact with Europeans, the continued practice of sati was personally embarrassing.

After a long struggle, Rammohun and Dwarkanath won their victory against conservative opposition. In December 1829 Lord...
Bentinck and his council passed the regulation making sati illegal and its administration punishable in the criminal courts. The conservative leaders formed the Dharma Sabha and employed a group of lawyers to appeal the law before the Privy Council. Many years later one of the lawyers, McDougall, still had not been paid, and his Calcutta agent appealed to Dwarkanath and Prasanna Kumar, among others, to honor the debt. Ordinarily Dwarkanath would have been the first to respond to such a request; now he reminded the agent, John Storm, of the role he and Prasanna Kumar had played in the anti-sati movement. "You cannot, I am sure, for one moment suppose that I, or the Reformer [Prasanna Kumar] or any true son of humanity will contribute the smallest iota towards the payment of the sum... on account of expenses attending the appeal against the abolition of that diabolical system of Suttee! I am proud to say, I stood among the first of those who... helped to suppress that species of murder... by proper representations to the Noble Lord our Ruler who has thereby, if no other act, immortalized his name here and wherever it was known that such barbarous atrocity was practiced in India." He suggested to Storm that Rajnarayan Ray and Ashutosh Day, principal supporters of the Dharma Sabha, would "wipe off their responsibilities." 45

Second only to sati as an issue that embittered the Bengali community against Rammohun Roy and his followers was their stand on European settlement. Rammohun and his followers joined the European mercantile community in advocating the abolition of restrictions on the holding of land by Europeans in the mufassal. At a public meeting in December 1829, Dwarkanath moved to support the petition of the Europeans, and both he and Rammohun spoke in favor of European settlement in India. The opposition, led by officials of the East India Company, included the majority of the Bengali community. Some of the Indians had unhappy experiences with disruptive European adventurers in the mufassal, others were xenophobic or harbored vague fears of religious pollution. They petitioned Parliament, and their newspaper, the Sanschar Chandra, editorialized that if colonization occurred, "the natives will lose caste... their means of subsistence will be destroyed, and... continual disputes will arise with the English relative to lands." 46

The most articulate advocate of European colonization was Rammohun Roy, who, with Dwarkanath in agreement, viewed the question in the broad context of India's history and future place in international society. They saw India as a vast subcontinent occupied by many different communities, castes, tribes, sects, and nations. Each of the subcontinent's foreign invaders had eventually made India his home, entered into the Indian social fabric, and dropped distinctions between conqueror and conquered. Rammohun expected the most recent among the conquerors, the British, to follow the pattern and foresaw, in time, an India that was Christian (if not in a formal sense, at least in an ethical sense), modernized, prosperous, and, in some measure, associated with England. The Indian empire of the future was to be a realm of British-Indian partnership in all spheres—political, economic, and cultural. In the future, wrote Rammohun Roy, "the existence of a large body of respectable settlers... would bring that vast Empire in the east to a level with other large Christian countries in Europe, and by means of its immense riches and extensive population... may succeed sooner or later in enlightening and civilizing the surrounding nations of Asia." 47

In formulating his ideal of empire, Rammohun must have drawn upon the Roman model as portrayed by Gibbon: "The grandsons of the Gauls... commanded legions, governed provinces, and were admitted into the Senate of Rome. Their ambition, instead of disturbing the tranquillity of the state, was intimately connected with its safety and greatness." 48 Rammohun's view of the Mughal Empire is strikingly similar, and he once wrote the King in Council comparing the Mughal to the British policy: "Under their former Muhammadan Rulers, the natives of this country enjoyed every political privilege in common with Musalmans, being eligible to the highest offices in the state, entrusted with the command of armies and the government of provinces and often chosen as advisers to their 46 J.K. Majumdar, pp. 432-45. Restrictions on European settlement were abolished, but few Britons settled in India. Still, the opposition's contention that Europeans would disrupt mufassal life in Bengal proved correct.
Prince, without disqualification or degrading distinction on account of their religion or the place of their birth . . . . Under British rule, the natives of India have entirely lost this political consequence. 49

Thus far, the East India Company had not fulfilled the mission of creating a British empire in India. It was still at heart a trading company and its efforts had been primarily directed to extending the commercial structure of Britain. Because of its limited objectives, the company tried to effect as little social change as possible, and therefore insisted upon restricting free British settlers from coming to India and upsetting conservative Indian society. Rammohun believed that the presence of British settlers would force the government to broaden political participation and to introduce British political institutions into India, creating in the process a true British-Indian empire. 50

Rammohun himself recognized the dangers and disadvantages of European settlement. He conceded that some of the indigo planters had “proved obnoxious to those who expected milder treatment from them” but that “no general good can be effected without some partial evil.” At least the planters treated the peasants better than did their own zamindars. They gave the peasants an alternative protector in the mufassal and “if any class of native ‘would gladly see them all turned out of the country’ it would be the zamindars in general, since in many instances the planters have successfully protected the ryots against the tyranny and oppression of their land-lord.” 51 Rammohun suggested that immigration be limited to Europeans of the “high and better educated classes,” that all subjects be placed on the same judicial footing, and that cases be tried by juries composed impartially of both races. 52

Furthermore, he had no illusions about the capacity of the British for racial arrogance and himself had encountered rude and overbearing behavior. He hinted at his deeper feelings in a letter to Prasanna Kumar from England: “Though it is impossible for a thinking man not to feel the evils of political subjection and dependence on a

49Nag and Burman, English Works, pt. IV, pp. 26-27. Dwarkanath did not share Rammohun’s favorable view of Hindu-Muslim relations in the Mughal Empire, but he did envision an Indo-British empire in terms similar to those of Rammohun. 50ibid., pt. III, p. 63.

52Nag and Burman, English Works, pt. IV, p. 40.
53Collet, Raja Rammohun Roy, p. 249.
55Ibid., pp. 453-55.

foreign people, yet when we reflect on the advantages which we have derived and may hope to derive from our connection with Great Britain, we may be reconciled to the present state of things which promises permanent benefits to our posterity.” 52 It was not westernization in toto that he advocated for India. He attacked Christianity for its own absurdities and irrationalities, favorably compared the “domestic conduct” of Indians to Europeans, and asserted that “in point of vices the Hindus are not worse than the generality of Christians in Europe and America.” 53 His object was the regeneration of India and to accomplish this he would play upon the humanitarian, utilitarian, and evangelical instincts of the rulers. It was immaterial that high ethical behavior was no more pervasive in Europe than in India. To the extent their British rulers in India held high-minded sentiments they could be enlisted in the cause of Indian reform and regeneration.

Dwarkanath contributed to the debate by introducing an economic dimension. He told how indigo manufacture had improved the condition of both ryots and zamindars, how land had increased in value, and how he and his relatives had made a great deal of money from planting indigo. Unrestricted immigration would open the way for the manufacture of other articles that India was capable of producing “of an excellence and quality, as any other [country] in the world, and which of course cannot be expected to be produced without the free recourse of Europeans.” 54 Along the same lines, the Reformas referred specifically to the entrepreneurial skills that Europeans would bring and anticipated that India would develop into a manufacturing country competing with Britain itself. 55

Yet neither Rammohun nor Dwarkanath viewed India as the passive beneficiary of western civilization. If Britishes were to participate in the rejuvenation of Indian society, Indians must join in and help reform British society. It was to India’s interest that its rulers were men who held enlightened principles. Just as he attacked orthodox Hinduism, Rammohun spoke out in criticism of the irrational in Christianity and formed his Unitarian society as his contribution to religious reform in the West. In politics he called for reform in the international passport and visa system that prevailed in
Europe and lobbied in favor of the Reform Bill of 1832. He did all this as an "insider," since he considered himself a British subject as well as an Indian. After the passage of the Reform Bill he wrote a British friend: "As I publically avowed that in the event of the Reform Bill being defeated I would renounce my connection with this country, I refrained from writing to you or any other friend in Liverpool until I knew the result. Thank Heaven, I can now feel proud of being one of your fellow subjects." 56

From Ramkohun, Dwarkanath learned that the affairs of the British were his own affairs. He would in time give his own expression to the concept of imperial partnership. British causes would become his own, he would donate liberally to their charities, patronize their arts and play a leading role in the civic life of the British community of Calcutta. Just as Ramkohun had had the temerity to lend his hand in the reform of Christianity, Dwarkanath would take a leading role in the modernization of British-Indian business institutions. They both subordinated their particular ethnic loyalties to their identities as imperial citizens.

As a "British subject" Ramkohun Roy was eager to observe the Reform Bill debates at first hand and to testify before the select committee of the House of Commons to consider renewal of the charter of the East India Company. In addition, he had undertaken to act as agent for the cause of the King of Delhi. When he left for England on 19 November 1830, Dwarkanath must have watched him sail off with a heavy heart. The leadership of the new sect, the Brahma Samaj, and of the large number of dependants who constituted the party of Ramkohun Roy now fell on his shoulders. Ramkohun died in England on 27 September, 1832. "When the news of Ramkohun Roy's death came," wrote Debendranath, "I was by my father, and he began to weep like a boy." 57

56 Ramkohun Roy to William Rathbone, 31 July 1832, quoted in Collet, p. 334.

Chapter II
ZAMINDAR, DEWAN, AND BANIAN

By 1830 Dwarkanath was a man of wealth and influence, ready to shoulder the responsibility of leading the Brahmo faction. His position was built on three components—his increasing stature as a landowner, his official connections with the government, and his financial and commercial enterprises. Each of these must be dealt with separately, but Dwarkanath pursued his three careers simultaneously and his success in any one of them helped him to succeed in the others. As early as 1812, when he assumed personal supervision of the estates inherited from Ramlochan, he began to develop competence in land-tenure law and zamindari accounting. Perhaps because he saw an opportunity to serve other zamindars as advisor, he expanded his legal knowledge under the guidance of Robert Cutlar Ferguson, one of the small but important group of British advocates who practiced before the Supreme Court in Calcutta. 1

Under Ferguson, Dwarkanath mastered regulation law and the procedures of the Supreme, sudder, and zilla courts. He then set himself up as a legal agent and attracted as clients some of the leading zamindars of Bengal, among them Rajah Baradakant Roy of the

Jorore Raj, Durga Charan Mookerjee of Bagabazar, Harinath Roy of Cossimbazar, and Rani Kateyan of the Paikpara Raj family. In addition to his fees, Dwarkanath realized other financial advantages. For example, he borrowed Rs. 75,000 from Harinath Roy in 1827 at 4 percent when the market rate was 0 to 12 percent. Dwarkanath started his career as a zamindari agent in 1815, a watershed year in the land-revenue history of Bengal. After a generation of floundering, the zamindars were at last learning how to preserve their estates from the auction block and had begun to reverse the tide of sales that had begun with the Permanent Settlement of 1793. Although the regulation strengthened the zamindars by allowing them to seize the property of defaulting tenants, the original revenue demand set by Cornwallis in 1793 had been ruinous. Payment was enforced by a law of sale and implemented mercilessly. The government allowed no suspension of tax payments in case of natural calamity, and the British judicial concepts upon which the laws were founded were incomprehensible to most of the zamindars. By 1812, more than half the estates in Bengal had been wrested from the hands of their original owners and many were sold at auction to families with newly acquired wealth. Some districts were harder hit than others. In Jessore, for example, all of the 122 estates in existence in 1793 fell into arrears over the next decade and were subdivided and sold in parcels to the highest bidders. By 1800 there were 5,044 small zamindars in place of the 122 old aristocrats. Among the new zamindars were Dharma Narayan and Gopinath Tagore, who participated in the dismemberment of the vast Nattor Raj.

By 1815 the cost had been reached. The zamindars had become accustomed to the laws, and, to preserve their estates, both the old survivors and the new zamindars had learned to resort to every available legal stratagem and circumvention. The laws elaborating upon and modifying the original act of 1793 were in the form of highly technical regulations stating conditions under which estates in


3JWBA, Court of War, no. 8-11, March 1837.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estate, location, &amp; date acquired</th>
<th>Gross income (rubies) 1894</th>
<th>Jumma * 1898</th>
<th>Gross income (rubies) 1900</th>
<th>Jumma, excess of income over collection charges 1900</th>
<th>Average net income 1900</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Berhampore, 1807</td>
<td>50,000</td>
<td>16,807</td>
<td>1,73,891</td>
<td>63,272</td>
<td>1,10,569</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(with)</td>
<td>(Kaligram)</td>
<td>(Kaligram)</td>
<td>(Kaligram)</td>
<td>(Kaligram)</td>
<td>(Kaligram)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercially &amp; Sadakat in Piliba, Nadia &amp; Jessore D. 1807</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>16,043</td>
<td>36,911</td>
<td>12,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paharpur in Cuttack 1807</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>1,1,673</td>
<td>19,350</td>
<td>5,960</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(included with Berhampore)</td>
<td>(Pandua)</td>
<td>(Pandua)</td>
<td>(B &amp; P)</td>
<td>(B &amp; P)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shaharapur in Piliba &amp; Rajshahi D. 1834</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>10,980</td>
<td>1,38,357</td>
<td>32,658</td>
<td>1,05,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,30,000</td>
<td>55,583</td>
<td>3,68,500</td>
<td>1,34,229</td>
<td>2,34,510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: 1834 figures from KNT ann. p. 58. Other figures from Case for Opinion, in division of property of Debdranath Tagore requested by Hiirdranath Tagore, et al., in Khelindranath Tagore Collection, Archives of Rabindranath Bharati University, Calcutta.

*Jumma: Total land revenue paid by zamindar to government. Under the Permanent Settlement, would have been little changed between 1834 and 1898.

on mortgages. Tagore acquired a number of other zamindaris, some of which he held in partnership with others. Finally, he acted at times as the general manager for the whole of the Tagore family estates scattered in every district of lower Bengal, estates that, in his own words, accounted for one-fifth of the total land revenue of the lower provinces. As a zamindar Dwarkanath was mercilessly efficient and business-like, but not generous. The editor of the "Bengal Hurkaru" once wrote: "We do not remember to have heard that . . . he differs much from the rest of his class. Have the ryots upon his estates been happier than those on the estates of his neighbours—has he done much to mitigate the sufferings of the laboring people—to lessen the amount of oppression and extortion, exercised almost universally on the estates?

8WBBSA, Criminal Department Proceedings, 15 December (1-3) 1840.

9Bengal Hurkaru, 6 Jan. 1843.

10WBBSA, Territorial Revenue Department Proceedings, 9 Apr. (20) and 28 May (18-12) 1824.

11WBBSA, Territorial Revenue Department Proceedings, 8 July (10) 1833 and 15 January (17) 1834.
other quarter, nor even from its adjacent villages. I suspect there must be some other cause for so many Istasfs being at once tendered. From the way things are going on there, there will, I fear, in a few months hence, hardly remain any ryots at all. Pray make a full enquiry into the matter and write to me on the subject at your earliest convenience." 12

Hard as he was with his peasants, he was even more so in his dealings with other zamindars and European indigo planters. He purchased Shahazarpad in Pahra from the heirs of Sibchunder Bhattacharyya, who had fallen on hard times and were forced to sell their estate at auction. The heirs, including the mother of the zamindar, had tried to protect themselves by acquiring undertenures with permanently fixed rents. But Dwarkanath abrogated these and ousted them from the land. 13 As one of his estate managers, Alexander Forbes, recalled, Dwarkanath "made very hard bargains" with European planters and leased villages to indigo factories for more than they could realize in rental income. For example, he let a village to the Hizlabat Concern for Rs. 10,000 although the concern could collect rents from it amounting to only Rs. 7,000; but it willingly paid for the lease, expecting to make up for the loss in indigo production. In another case, according to Forbes, Tageore forced the same concern to lease a village from him by threatening to cut off the services of boatmen and cattlers from their other factories. 14 When planters were squeezed by zamindars they passed on the burden to the indigo cultivators, forcing them to give up their plant for little in return. Dwarkanath must be included among those zamindars who contributed to the oppressive nature of the indigo system.

Lower Bengal was a turbulent and unsettled province in Tageore's day, and many of the zamindars and indigo planters retained armed bands to decide disputes over the possession of territory. But Dwarkanath relied instead on his ability to command the resources of

12 Dwarkanath Tageore to T.F. Rice, Sylhahar, Commercially, dated Calcutta, 18 Apr. 1836, in KNT ms., p. 58. This may have been the incident referred to by Knesey Chand Mitra who relates that the ryots of Bardhaman petitioned against Tageore and won the support of their magistrate, but that Dwarkanath obtained some information against him and by threatening him with blackmail into ignoring their petitions, forced the ryots to succumb. Knesey Chand Mitra, Memoir, pp. 16-17.
13 Bengal Gazette, 30 Jan. 1837.
15 Dwarkanath Tageore to J. Marquez, Mohununge, Pahra, dated Calcutta, 16 Nov. 1835, in KNT ms.
manager was to sign all vouchers and accounts and transmit them to Dwarkanath.17

The government became aware of Dwarkanath's legal and managerial talents quite early in his career. In 1822, at the age of 28, Dwarkanath was appointed sheristadar or head Indian officer of the salt agency of the 24-Parganas. In recommending him for the post, Trevor Plowden, the salt agent, described him as "a native of very high character and respectability; he has not been before employed in the service of government, but is a person of good education and fully qualified for the situation to which he is nominated."18 His immediate predecessor in the position was Ramtanu Roy, a first cousin and close friend of Rammohan Roy.19 It being customary in such appointments to permit an office holder to nominate a successor, the salt agency may well have been a stronghold of the Rammohan Roy faction.

Dwarkanath was to spend the next twelve years in the Salt Department under the Board of Customs, Salt, and Opium, which supervised the manufacture and wholesale distribution of salt. As a government monopoly the sale of salt provided a source of revenue second only to that of the land tax. There were six salt agencies in Bengal, situated in districts where the earth had a high saline content; one of these was in the 24-Parganas, to which Dwarkanath was appointed sheristadar. The producers of salt, called molunghes, were often illiterate peasants who received advances from the agency headquarters and in turn hired coolies to help collect saline earth, boil it, and produce the salt. In April of each year, at the end of the salt-manufacturing season, the molunghes would bring their bags of salt to the agency headquarters and receive a payment from which the advance was deducted. Thereafter, until the next November, all manufacture of salt was illegal. The salt was delivered to the government salt warehouse in Howrah and there auctioned to merchants and retailers who came from all parts of Bengal.20

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17 Dwarkanath Tagore to J.C. Miller, dated Calcutta, 14 Jan. 1836, in KNT ms., p. 56.
18WB/BSA, Board of Customs, Salt and Opium, Salt Proceedings, no. 21, 14 March (1) 1823.
19Ibid., Collect, Rao Rammohan Roy, p. 69.
21 WB/BSA, Board of Customs, Salt and Opium, Proceedings, 7 Nov. (8-10) 1828.
22Ibid.
23Minute of H.M. Parker, 1 Mar. 1834, in ibid.
oppression by Gopi Mohun Mullick, the daroga or head of the customs station. The petitions alleged that the daroga had deducted credit from the molunghes's accounts for varying quantities of salt to enable him to "make good his agreement for 5,000 rupees with Dwarkanath Thakoor, the Dewan of the Salt Board." This deduction, wrote the petitioners, became popularly known among the molunghes as "Dwarkanath's khotkhori" (settlement).

The acting magistrate of Barasat, Richard Herbert Mytton, was ordered to make a thorough investigation. The daroga having died, Dwarkanath was exonerated without witnesses. Mytton reported that the daroga had indeed extorted from the molunghes, and, although "the legal proof of his [Tagore's] misconduct is somewhat imperfect, I have not considered it necessary to call upon him for explanations, still there are just grounds of suspicion that his name was not made use of without a cause," Mytton's conclusion was rejected by the Board, for neither C. Doyly, the senior member, nor Parker, the junior member, was willing to concede that any suspicion fell on Dwarkanath. Parker, in an overstated and lengthy minute, defended the integrity of Dwarkanath and attributed the allegations to attempts by the orthodox party to destroy his reputation.

Parker pointed out that once before, when Dwarkanath had been sheristadar of the 24-Parganas, he had been accused of stealing government salt. At that time, Parker said, his accusers had been orthodox Hindus, encouraged by their Brahmins to harass him because of his association with Rammohun Roy, his intimacy with "impure" Europeans, his supposedly hedonistic way of life, and his refusal to propitiate the Brahmins with gifts, build temples, or endow shrines. They had presented a petition to the board stating that a deficiency of 9,000 maund of salt had been discovered in the Noolahah Golah, "of which Dwarkanath Tagore was cognizant and by which he had profited," but an investigation disclosed no shortage of salt and Dwarkanath was cleared.

Now, in the face of another accusation, Parker defended Tagore on grounds that the accusation was too vague, that the sum involved was small compared with the lakhs of rupees Dwarkanath could have taken illegally if he had so chosen, and that because of his high character the whole idea was absurd and distressing. As he was a wealthy and well-known figure, Parker pointed out, his name could have been used by a lower officer in the service for the purpose of exaction. Above all, as the leader of the Brahmo party and the progressive Hindus, he must be supported by the British. He and his kind provided the justification for British rule in India—for the sake of that civilization which the British Government proclaims it to be their first object to promote," the good name of Dwarkanath Tagore must be saved. He and his followers must be defended from attack by the bigots of orthodoxy.

The governor-general-in-council reviewed the case and expressed less certainty of the complete innocence of Dwarkanath. Finally, the India Office in turn studied the entire proceedings and argued a priori that not only Tagore but the daroga was completely innocent and that the charges were false. Their view was that it appeared from reference to the accounts that the "full produce of the annum had been returned by the daroga and under his khotkhori he was bound to deliver this amount." He would, in fact, have lost money himself if he did not. Consequently, they held, apart from the minute of Mr. Parker, the Dewan was innocent and so was the daroga.

It cannot be known for certain whether or not Dwarkanath used his position as dewan for personal gain. On the one hand, he had every opportunity for extortion, and he emerged from his job a wealthy man. On the other, petty thievery would have been out of character and grand larceny would have presented too great a risk of discovery. The accusers may indeed, as Parker contended, have been opponents of Dwarkanath for religious or party reasons. But perhaps Parker attributed too much to religion and party. It may well have been that Dwarkanath was, by local standards, overzealous in stamping out petty illegalities among the molunghes and lower-rank employees in his department. The molunghes were poor men, and the coolies who worked under them even poorer. Illicit salt manufacture was their only means of survival. To avoid prosecution they bribed the lower officials in the salt agency, and thus everybody in the system benefited from illicit manufacture. Into this situation stepped Dwarkanath Tagore, who combined British punctiliousness with a Bengali's inside knowledge of illegal operations—a dangerous combination. In the eyes of the molunghes and minor officials, he was a threat to their livelihood. 24

24 WBASS, Board of Customs, Salt and Opium, Salt Proceedings, 15 Apr. (41-44) 1834.

25 Ibid.

26 RG Records, Despatches to India and Bengal, vol. 8, pp. 701-16; Separate Revenue Department, Customs, Salt and Opium, 15 Apr. (4) 1836.
Dwarkanath was too much a man of the Raj, a collaborator interested more in pleasing his masters than in good-humoredly participating in a bit of harmless illicit manufacture and sale of salt. One need not look for religious motives to explain why the molunghees tried to rid themselves of their uncompromising Dewan.

On August 1, 1834, Dwarkanath resigned his office as Dewan, to be succeeded by Prasanna Kumar Tagore. He had launched his own agency house in partnership with William Carr and gave as his reason for resigning "the pressure of private business." From that time on he was finished with government service, and zamindari was to be only his secondary occupation. He was entering a new stage of his career as first and foremost a man of business—merchant, financier, entrepreneur.

Dwarkanath had been carrying on some business activity since the early 1820s, beginning in the most prosaic manner as a moneylender. He started modestly enough, lending small sums of Rs 2,000

27. WBSA, Board of Revenue, Salt Department, Original Consultations, 8 Aug. (15) 1834.
29. List of persons who received loans from Dwarkanath Tagore:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Date of loan maturity</th>
<th>Amount (Rs.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muthuromuho Shaw</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chittogopal</td>
<td>1820</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bhandaram Siddar and other zamindars</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>21,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DT and Benj. Preston)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richardson, Bengal C.S.</td>
<td>1826</td>
<td>21,032</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Beevon Birch, indigo planter</td>
<td>1829</td>
<td>20,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Barfoot</td>
<td>1833</td>
<td>4000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beit Chunder Ghose</td>
<td>1833</td>
<td>14,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R.C. Jenkins, merchant</td>
<td>1834</td>
<td>3000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald McDonald, indigo planter</td>
<td>1855</td>
<td>10,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Armstrong Currie, shipbuilder</td>
<td>1835</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Baird</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Freeman</td>
<td>1837</td>
<td>1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archdall Bayce, indigo planter</td>
<td>1838</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bannamth Roy and Monteemath Roy et al.</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>1,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hay Twedale Stewart</td>
<td>1841</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Smith, indigo planter</td>
<td>1842</td>
<td>32,557</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranj Indrane and Annund Chundra Ghose</td>
<td>1843</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Chardon, indigo planter</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>12,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mahajang Cower Bardeo-Sing</td>
<td>1846</td>
<td>50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Storm</td>
<td>1849</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Calcutta High Court, Plea Side; Tagore Family Archives, Rabindra Sadhana; Calcutta Supreme Court Civil Side; Calcutta Supreme Court, Plea Side.

33. Henry Keller vs Dwarkanath Tagore, et al., Supreme Court, 16 Feb. 1835, reported in Bengal Hariana, 18 Feb. 1835. Dwarkanath applied to Keller for a loan of Rs. 50,000 on behalf of Mackintosh and Company.
through the Commercial Bank, one of the three private western-style banks associated with Calcutta agency houses. The bank, which opened in 1819, had been founded by a group that included Gopi Mohun Tagore, Joseph Barretto, whose house handled Portuguese business, and Mackintosh partners Gordon and Calder. Although originally conceived as a joint-stock bank to serve the needs of all the agency houses, the bank gradually became synonymous with the cash department of Mackintosh and Company, and by 1828 its only remaining proprietors were members of the firm and Dwarkanath Tagore.

In that year the partners of the Commercial Bank decided to revert to their original purpose and to start a new joint-stock bank that would be of equal benefit to all the traders of Calcutta engaged in international commerce. There was a critical need for such a bank. The other three banks in the city were the Bank of Hindostan, founded in 1770, owned by Alexander and Company; the Calcutta Bank, founded by John Palmer in 1824; and the Bank of Bengal, a quasi-official bank founded in 1809. Inasmuch as the three private agency-house banks were little more than cashiers for their houses, those firms without banks were at a disadvantage. The quasi-official Bank of Bengal, largest and wealthiest, was little more than the government treasury and during the Burmese War of 1824 diverted all its capital to the war effort, leaving the merchants of Calcutta without short-term accommodation. 34

Under these circumstances the partners of the Commercial Bank decided to found a separate bank, independent of either an agency house or the government. To preserve its independence they proposed that the number of shares held by any one individual be limited, election of directors be open, and the directors be changed frequently. 35 At a public meeting held in May 1829, regulations were drawn up and elections were held. In the last week of August, subscriptions for shares were opened, and within three weeks 181 persons had subscribed 444 shares for a total of Rs. 11,00,000. The Union Bank opened for business on September 28 when 500 shares for Rs. 12,00,000 had been subscribed. 36

The fifteen new directors were drawn primarily from the big houses but included a few independent merchants. Three Indians were elected directors—Hari Mohun Tagore, Radha Ramadas Bannerjee, and Raj Chunder Dass. Ashutosh Dey was chosen as one of the three trustees. In July, William Carr, an independent merchant, was elected Secretary. Interestingly, there were complaints among the Indian shareholders that they were underrepresented in the directorate, which may indicate that they had subscribed to more than three-fifteenths of the shares. Dwarkanath himself, still a public official, remained in the background, but his power was demonstrated in the election of his brother Ramanath, as Treasurer after a vigorous canvas for votes. Although ten votes was the maximum number any single shareholder could exercise, Dwarkanath had a large constituency among the shareholders. Some were his dependents, some his debtors, and others his friends and relatives, and some shares had been bought by Dwarkanath in the name of others. 37 In the course of the ensuing twenty years the bank's capital would double in size many times over, it would come under the domination of a few large houses, including Carr, Tagore and Company, enter intrepidly upon risky ventures, and with a resounding crash in 1848 pull down the entire commercial community in its wake. But meanwhile, during the lifetime of Dwarkanath Tagore, the Union Bank was the keystone of the commercial structure of Calcutta.

Only three months elapsed between the opening of the Union Bank and the closing of John Palmer and Company, whose bankruptcy inaugurated the devastating commercial crisis of 1830–33. The atmosphere of confidence and expansiveness evaporated overnight. Alexander and Company closed its doors in December 1832 and Mackintosh in January 1833. 38 By January 1834 no major house had survived and the entire system had to be rebuilt. During this period, Dwarkanath stood firm as a rock. He was the only solvent partner in the now diminished Commercial Bank, and as soon as Mackintosh failed he issued a notice that he would pay all outstanding claims against the Commercial Bank and receive sums due to it. 39 He did the same with the Oriental Life Assurance

35 Bengali Hafton, 20 May 1829.
36 Bengali Hafton, 23 June 1843; India Gazette, 14 Sept. and 25 June 1829; Government Gazette 28 Sept., 9 July, and 15 Oct. 1829. The latter are excerpts in KN Collection.
37 Palmer Papers, Engl. Lit. c 115; Palmer to Roggeveen Goenin, 30 Aug. 1830.
38 For a list of debts and credits of Mackintosh and Company, see Bengali Hafton, 3 Jan. 1833.
39 India Gazette, 7 Jan. 1833.
Society, owned by himself and the partners of three fallen houses—Ferguson and Company, Cruttenden and Company, and Mackintosh and Company. The society had been founded in 1822 to insure the lives of agency-house partners and debtors whose liabilities could then be met in case of death. Its assets had been used as additional trading capital by the proprietors, and when their houses failed, Dwarkanath Tagore, the only solvent partner, assumed the assets and agreed to meet demands on the company. In 1834 he formed the New Oriental Life Assurance Company with a new set of partners to carry out the engagements of the old company.

Dwarkanath emerged from the commercial crisis of 1830–33 as the dominant figure in the Calcutta business world. He was one of the few Calcutta businessmen who had sources of wealth that were untouched directly by the commercial crisis. A little hard money would go a long way in that period, and it was thanks to his sagacious business operations as a moderately wealthy man who was able to take the field when the giants had stumbled and fallen that he emerged as one of the leading commercial men in the period 1834–46. If not the leading one. The basis of Dwarkanath’s solvency was his zamindari position. From 1830 to 1834, income from his estates must have brought him between Rs. 65,000 and 1,10,000 per year. In addition, he was able to raise money on the security of his land. Compared to the incomes of the great zamindars of Bengal this was a relatively modest sum, but among the destitute European merchants of Calcutta he was a solid man among figures of straw. Nevertheless, under the barrage of requests for help his resources were stretched to the limit. John Palmer, who spent the last few years of his life trying to salvage the constituents for whose poverty he felt responsible, was constantly writing to his friend “Dwarky” for small loans. But, as he wrote to a widowed constituent who was in desperate straits, “Dwarkanath has full employment for all he possesses or can raise; or else there would be no strict limit to his Liberality.” And again: “I signify he borrows to lend and to carry on his own concerns.”

Once, early in 1832, Dwarkanath was so hard pressed that he could not raise Rs. 1,000. Later that year asked the Board of Customs, Salt, and Opium to release the collateral security of Rs. 50,000 he had deposited on taking office in 1828. He argued that he could invest the money, then drawing 4 percent, at 8 or 9 percent, “an advantage which, with advancement to the amount of my salary in this office, I am persuaded the Board would not consider it equitable to deprive me of.” The board accepted a personal security in Mackintosh and Company and returned his Rs. 50,000.

Of the Rs. 50,000 he loaned Rs. 10,000 to John Palmer on behalf of his brother William Palmer and Sir William Rumbold of Hyderabad fame. Rumbold was in need of Rs. 45,000 to pay his bankers the interest on the loans taken out in previous years and lent in turn to the Nizam of Hyderabad. He was awaiting a decision from the Court of Directors on the validity of the Hyderabad loans, which had totaled over four million rupees. Rumbold estimated that he would be awarded at least a 10 percent recovery, and he was not to be disappointed. John Palmer raised the funds needed by Rumbold in a tight money market—Rs. 25,000 from his old banian, Raggoram Gonsain; Rs. 10,000 from his Persian translator, Hurrochander Lahory; and Rs. 10,000 from Dwarkanath Tagore. Dwarkanath brought in his relative, Laddly Mohun Tagore, as co-lender.

Dwarkanath hinted at another source of his funds in this period. When Mackintosh and Company failed in January 1833, he assumed among its obligations the payment of the taxes on Mandulehat, a huge estate held in trust by the firm. Dwarkanath paid the tax of Rs. 1,50,000 and suggested where he obtained the money: “In 1833 money was very scarce. Being pressed for money on Mackintosh’s failure, I got a loan on mortgage from my personal friends.” Those of his personal friends who were European were far more hard pressed than was Dwarkanath. He could only have meant his Indian friends.

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41 See table of Patrimonial Zamindars, above.
43 Palmer Papers, Eng. Lett. c 120, Palmer to Dwarkanath Tagore, 27 Feb. 1832.
44 WSBA, Customs, Salt and Opium, Salt Proceedings, 17 July (22-23) 1832.
45 Palmer Papers, Eng. Lett. c 121, Palmer to William Rumbold, 25 May 1832 and Eng. Lett. c 124, John Palmer to William Palmer, 15 July 1834. Among the lesser favors Palmer asked of Dwarkanath was to purchase some Rs. 2,400 of Danish lottery tickets which he had pledged to sell on behalf of the Scrammepore government and for aid to one Waker Lookte’s who had been imprisoned. Palmer Papers, Eng. Lett. c 124, Palmer to Dwarkanath, 24 and 25 Sep. and 19 Oct. 1833; Eng. Lett. c 123, Palmer to Waker Lookte’s, 14 Mar. 1833.
friends, access to whom, along with his own properties, provided him with the financial resiliency to survive 1833 and flourish in 1834.

Now, at the age of forty, Dwarkanath took his place as the leading businessman of Calcutta. Business, however, never engrossed his full attention; it was, rather, a means to support himself in a role he considered equally important—that of Calcutta's civic leader. His contemporaries saw him as, above all, an enlightened, modern Hindu prince and the paradigm of his race. In his physical appearance, however, there was little to indicate his strength of will and his worldly power. He was of medium height, "his limbs are beautifully molded, his hand being the most delicate we have ever seen belonging to one of the male sex; his countenance, in a state of repose, bears an aspect of peculiar thoughtfulness, but when lighted up, is one of great expression and striking beauty." He received scant affection from his immediate family, and with his wife, Digambari, he had little in common. Six children were born to them, of whom four, all males, survived infancy: Debendranath, 1817-1905; Girindranath, 1820-54; Bhupendranath, 1826-39; and Nagendranath, 1829-58. Digambari herself died in January 1839, two days after the death of their thirteen-year-old son, Bhupendranath. As soon as Dwarkanath had begun to cultivate the friendship of Europeans and to join with them while they dined, Digambari and the other female relatives who lived at Jorasanko had expelled him from the family house. He was obliged to live in a separate building, and there, in his haathk khana, to receive his impure visitors. Banished from Jorasanko, Dwarkanath established another seat for his princely role, Belgachia. This was a villa four miles from Dum Dum, north of Calcutta, which he purchased in the mid-1820s for about Rs. 5,00,000.

In its gaudy decor and eclectic furnishings, Belgachia was typical of the great nineteenth-century bhadralok mansions. The house was approached on an entrance road, brilliantly illuminated at night, and entered through a marble hall. On the right of the foyer was an elegant staircase adorned with statues of Cornelia and the Gracchi, the Venus Baigneuse, and Psyche. At the top of the stairs was a central hall, of Treppischore, whose walls were hung with fine paintings and whose floor was adorned with statues of a reading Nymph, and a recumbent Venus embowered in roses. On the left of the hall was a spacious verandah, decorated to resemble a Mongol tent, with leafy walls and garlands of flowers, in the center of which was a throne of crimson velvet and gold embroidery, with pillars of solid silver chased and inlaid with gold. On the right was the music room, filled with oil paintings, marble furniture, orange damask curtains, porcelain vases, and alabaster clocks. Other rooms adjoining this one held paintings, engravings, and ivory miniatures. The subjects of the paintings included Venus and Mars, portraits of Indians, and scenes from a nautch. The south verandah was carpeted and adorned with white and crimson muslin, and its pillars were festooned with flowers.

Outside was a spacious lawn surrounded by a meandering stream over which passed four rustic bridges. In the center was a fountain, and beyond it a lifesized statue of the huntsman Melagor and his hound. In the distance a life-sized Venus could be seen rising from an artificial lake. On one side was a small island on which stood a Japanese temple, in the center an ionic temple containing copies of the celebrated group by Canova, and at the far end a Chinese pagoda covered with lights of every shape and color and further illuminated by brilliant stars rising from the water's edge. Around the edge of the lake were rows of pillars topped by flames, and lamps were placed everywhere at random.

Dwarkanath used Belgachia as an occasional residence, but his real purpose in maintaining the house was to shower hospitality on the social elite of Calcutta, both European and Indian. When he served dinners to Europeans, he included all meats except beef, sat with his guests and, though he did not touch the food, joined in drinking wine. He invited hundreds of people to his parties, including the highest ranking officials, who rubbed elbows with their Hindu subjects. Large groups were entertained with fireworks,
elephant rides, and musical performances; for small gatherings he devised unusual games in which the guests participated. Invitations to Belgatia were highly coveted. 54

In 1835, the government recognized Dwarkanath's influence by appointing him a justice of the peace, an honorary position newly opened to Indians. To balance his appointment the government selected as a second justice of the peace the social leader of orthodox Hindu society, Radha Kanta Deb. 55 Dwarkanath took an increasing interest in civic activities. In 1838 he was appointed chairman of a committee to establish a sanitary food and meat bazaar at Dhurrumtoollah. 56 But perhaps because of his own poor health, medical philanthropies were his special concern. In 1833 he was elected a member of the committee of the Leprosy Society 57 and in 1835 he supported the establishment of the Calcutta Medical College by contributing scholarships of Rs. 2,000 per year for three years. In April 1835 he joined with Motilal Seal and Rajah Protab Chandra Singh to plan the establishment of a fever hospital for the poor in the Indian section of the city. 58

Dwarkanath's philanthropic activities were not without political purpose and he used the occasion of an anti-sati meeting in 1832 to badger his orthodox opponents. A famine was raging in the Cuttack district of Orissa and, as he called on those present to donate to an emergency fund for its victims, he referred to the agent employed by the Dharmottar Sabha to carry their pro-sati appeal to Parliament:

Certainly if some of our countrymen could collect by subscription nearly 30,000 rupees to send an Englishman to England to gain the burning of living women, no one can imagine, think, or say, that to spend a few rupees to preserve the lives of all those people [in Orissa] would be extravagant. Please to observe how much money and labour English Gentlemen are devoting to the relief and preservation of our countrymen. But how melancholy it is, that we find our own countrymen so slack in this business. 59

58 Kasasy Chand Mitra, Memoir, pp. 26-27, 64.
59 J. K. Majumdar, ed., Raaja Ram Mohun Roy, p. 204. In fairness to the Dharmottoollah Sabha, it should be noted that some members of that organization had subscribed to the fund. Ibid., p. 214.

Still another of Dwarkanath's manifold civic activities was his patronage of the Calcutta press. In 1829 he joined Robert Montgomery Martin, Prasanna Kumar Tagore, Ramnath Roy, Nil Ruttun Holdar, and Rajkisan Singh in publishing the Bengal Herald, a bilingual weekly. 60 He purchased the daily India Gazette in 1834 and by combining it with the Bengal Hukumar, owned by Samuel Smith, gained part interest in the most important daily in Calcutta. 61 He undoubtedly helped to finance the weekly, Reformer, owned by Prasanna Kumar. Finally, he supplied the capital for the establishment of the second most important daily in Calcutta, the Englishman. John Bull, a venerable Tory newspaper catering mainly to the military service, went up for sale when its owners, the agency house of Cruenden, McKillop, crashed in 1834. With the help of Dwarkanath, a young journalist, J.H. Stockebreaker, bought the press for Rs. 18,000, changed the name to Englishman and the politics to "liberal." By the time he left India in 1843, Stockebreaker was able to dispose of the newspaper for Rs. 1,30,000. 62

Dwarkanath also made a special point of patronizing the Calcutta European theater. Among his dearest friends was H.M. Parker, who as member of the Board of Customs, Salt, and Opium, was his supervisor and supporter. "One of the cleverest people" in Calcutta, 63 Parker directed the amateur group that performed in the old Chowringhee Theater. His mother had been a ballerina at Covent Garden, where Parker, as a youth, played violin. Appointed to his lucrative Indian post by Lord Moira, Parker, as musician, actor, poet, and playwright, more than any single man raised the level of European cultural life in Calcutta. Under Parker's influence Dwarkanath became the major patron of the Chowringhee Theater and developed a life-long interest in European music, opera, and drama. Thus, on the threshold of his most important entrepreneurial undertaking, Dwarkanath projected not so much the image of speculator, moneylender, and rent-collector as that of renaissance prince.

60 Ibid., p. 327.
61 Bengal Hukumar 3 Mar. 1836.