A Public Policy Profile on Rural Development in Bengal

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INTRODUCTION

It was not until relatively recent times that there have been significant public policies proposed or implemented specifically for the development of the rural areas of Bengal. Many of these have been undertaken with indifference, lack of commitment, or in the face of serious controversy.

The British East India Company came into prominence in Bengal during the latter half of the eighteenth century and dominated its history for a full hundred years. Following the disasters of the mid-nineteenth century, the liberal conscience of Victorian England stimulated efforts to mitigate the harshness of natural calamity and exploitation by commercial interest. These actions were motivated largely by a sense of compassion and propriety. Despite the growth of rural infrastructure, social services, and local administration, little genuine development took place in the next hundred years. The turmoil of partition and independence, the density of population, and the extent of poverty, disease, ignorance, and hardship were hardly evidence of improvement in the lot of the average villager. For the most part, rural people persisted in a subordinate role within a pervasive patron-client system that, despite its fundamental humanitarian bias, provided little scope for the client's advance to peerage.

It is a thesis of this essay that rural development is a matter of restructuring life in rural areas. This includes the expansion of opportunity for economic, political, social, and cultural fulfillment. It also includes the improvement of the capacity of individuals and groups to shape and utilize these opportunities. Further, it includes the emergence of a set of norms conducive to such changes.
In drawing the picture of rural development policy in Bengal, I reach back briefly to the arrival of the British East India Company and the course of events up to 1947. Thereafter, I take up the principal postindependence programs implemented in West Bengal and East Bengal. Space requirements force this presentation into the form of a sketch or profile, but the concluding picture will be an outline of what I feel to be the crucial issues facing rural development in Bengal.

But first a few words about the region are in order. “Bengal” has been variously defined throughout history. The Bengal Presidency over which the British East India Company acquired revenue rights in 1765 included Assam, Bihar, and Orissa. The greatest extent of the Bengal Presidency was in 1810, when it reached as far as Delhi and to the Punjab. Assam was pared away in 1874, and East and West Bengal were temporarily separated during the period 1905–1911. Bihar and Orissa were not separated until 1912, but the ultimate diminution came with partition in 1947. The State of West Bengal at that point was one-seventh the size of the area known as Bengal a century earlier.¹

By 1956 West Bengal had added territories bringing its size up to its present dimension of 33,927 square miles. In 1961 the population of West Bengal was estimated at 34.9 million, indicating an average population density of 1029 per square mile at that time. In 1961 the population of East Bengal (then, East Pakistan) was estimated at 55.3 million in an area of 55,126 square miles, resulting in an average population density of 1002 per square mile. In the decade since that time populations have grown still further, although recent disruptions due to war make the current situation difficult to interpret.

Bengal is a delta laid down at the confluence of some of the world's largest rivers. The Ganges and Brahmaputra meet at about the middle of the region (see frontispiece) and are joined by the Meghna at a point south of Dacca to the east. Other significant rivers, such as the Damodar, come in from surrounding areas. The Damodar comes from Bihar and joins the Hooghly south of Calcutta before emptying into the sea. Riverbeds have shifted continuously throughout history, and the mouths of the Ganges pour into the Bay of Bengal over a waterfront more than two hundred miles in breadth. Although the rivers flood along their courses and deposit silt which sustains much of Bengal's agriculture, the biggest influence on agriculture is the alternation of wet and dry seasons characteristic of the monsoon.

In Bengal the monsoon rains begin in May and end, for all practical purposes, in early October. During March and April there are intermittent norwester storms that strike suddenly, usually with brief heavy downpours. The period from November and extending into March is virtually
without significant natural rainfall, and is a time of serious unemployment for most farmers. Temperatures in Bengal are conducive to farming throughout the year.

In East Bengal rice and jute are the two principal crops. The major rice season (Amon) is dependent on the monsoon rains, and it is during this season that the vast majority (about eighty-three percent) of the country’s rice output is produced.\textsuperscript{2} Approximately the same proportion holds true for West Bengal.\textsuperscript{3} Jute is a much more important crop in the east than it is in the west. In East Bengal about a million tons are produced annually; in West Bengal the figure is closer to forty thousand tons.\textsuperscript{4} Other crops of importance throughout Bengal are wheat and barley, beans, potatoes, sugarcane, pulses and oilseeds, and a number of spices.

With high population density the average farm is quite small. In East Bengal the average farm is reported as 3.5 acres, with over half the farms in holdings of 2.5 acres or less. Only 0.4 percent of the holdings are over 25 acres.\textsuperscript{5}

Data for five villages in the Burdwan district in West Bengal indicate that forty-one percent of the landholdings were less than three acres. However, over half the families in these villages were without land and participated in agriculture either as laborers or as sharecroppers.\textsuperscript{6}

The Company and Permanent Settlement

When the British East India Company began its operations in Bengal in the latter half of the seventeenth century, its position was tenuous and costly. By a series of steps the Company sought to establish itself and to obtain revenues with which to support its expanded operations. In 1698 it obtained the revenue collection rights to three towns adjacent to the original settlement and, having inserted itself into the revenue system of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb as a zamindar, proceeded to expand its control.\textsuperscript{7} After a colorful series of intrigues, skirmishes, and battles among European, Mogul, and indigenous Indian authorities, tensions resolved themselves with the Company emerging as the diwan, or revenue collector, for all of Bengal including Bihar and Orissa.

As immense as was the power to which the Company acceded, it was no simple task to administer the revenue system. The British continued to operate through intermediaries until suspicions of revenue leakages and a genuine need to know the revenue capacity of the territory led them to take a direct hand in fulfilling the role of diwan. It was some twenty years, however, before a seemingly feasible method of revenue collection was worked out. It proved unsatisfactory.

In 1793, the collection of revenue was turned over to zamindars who were obliged to remit to the diwan (the East India Company) a permanently
settled cash fee. One-tenth of this amount was the zamindar's commission, plus some minor additional revenues. This system promised the British a dependable revenue base without the administrative headaches. It is also argued that the system catered to the social tastes of the directors of the Company and the governor general, Lord Cornwallis. The zamindars, who were previously only revenue collectors, now became a propertied class not unlike the English landed gentry.

The Permanent Settlement also insulated the British from the knowledge of actual conditions in rural Bengal. The rights of the zamindars were ensured so long as they transmitted the revenues on time. Village records were nonexistent, and the insecurity of tenant cultivators of the zamindari led to a gathering unrest. Cultivators were tenants at will and could be turned out without recourse.

The first attempt at ensuring the rights of at least a segment of the tenant cultivators came with the Rent Act of 1859. This act formally guaranteed the security of tenure of tenants who had been on the land continuously for at least twelve years. Although a commendable step, these guarantees really applied to only a small proportion of all cultivators. And even those with occupancy rights found themselves harassed and hounded by zamindars at other points of vulnerability. A subsequent Tenancy Act in Bengal was passed in 1885 with the objective of controlling rent and preventing indiscriminate ejection of cultivators. However, this field of legal protection was simultaneously bounded by custom and traditional practice. In evaluating changes it is hard to measure the cost of deteriorating patronage benefits in the face of enhanced formal security. This is especially true when tenant cultivators are poorly informed as to their legal rights and cannot pay for the fight to have these rights enforced.

Virtually from the outset of the Permanent Settlement there had been doubts about its effectiveness in promoting rural stability and development. For the sake of administrative convenience, the governing authority had abdicated its responsibilities for rural development, blinded itself to rural conditions, and systematically failed to realize the actual revenue potential of the land. Subinfeudation meant that several intermediaries (sometimes, dozens) stood between the actual cultivator and the zamindar.

In East Bengal it was not until May 1951 that the Permanent Settlement was abolished. At that time it was replaced by the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of the previous year. Under its terms the cultivator was confirmed as proprietor and was to pay his taxes directly to the government. Government soon discovered that its administrative vigor on the revenue side had gone soft. The administration has since been under considerable pressure to organize, staff, and rationalize a function it had left in the hands of others for a century and a half.
The Influence of Famine on Rural Policy

From the earliest days, variations in agricultural output per person have led to recurring periods of local scarcity and privation. Even under today's conditions, a failure in the monsoon can lead to acute food shortages and the associated rise in prices of choice food grains beyond the reach of the ordinary consumer. Recent illustrations may be found in the succession of bad crop years in India in the late 1960s.

Famine conditions are those of extreme food shortage and severe human suffering. Records differ when reported by different sources, but up to the middle of the nineteenth century one source estimates an average of one major famine every fifty years. These famines were usually confined to local areas and were primarily the result of climatic variations.

With the development of a rail network in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the growth in the grain trade (including export), local prices could reach famine levels well beyond the extent explainable solely by the degree of shortfall in local production, if any. As always, famines have been a combination of food shortage and lack of purchasing power among those who suffer most. A picture of profiteers, hoarding stores of grain against a speculative rise in prices, is part of the record of every scarcity over the past hundred years.

Government has shown relatively little ability to cope with this phenomenon because it attempted direct symptomatic melioration rather than an attack on root causes. Famine relief was usually some combination of food-for-work policies, direct food distribution, and control of prices and the movement of goods. However commendable as an alternative to doing nothing, such policies attacked only the evidence of problems but not their causes. Hence, the problems have tended to recur.

It was at a very late juncture that government implemented effective public policy for organizing, training, and guiding cultivators and other small operators.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was no department of agriculture. Although a recommendation for its establishment was included in the report of the Famine Commission of 1866, it was not until after the famine of 1878 that the central administration in British India combined the idea of a central department of agriculture with the formation of similar departments in each province. Instructions were then issued to that effect.

Therefore, in 1885, Bengal established a modest department of agriculture. It was only subsequent to the famine at the turn of the century that the foundations of a regular agricultural service were laid. Nevertheless, despite the efforts to build a research and extension organization, expendi-
tures on the Agriculture Department of Bengal up to independence did not compare favorably with those in other states of British India.\textsuperscript{14}

The Agriculture Department's research program began in 1908 during the temporary division of Bengal. In 1911, the first rice-improvement program on the Indian subcontinent was established, with a headquarters at Dacca. Despite all this, the government's work in agriculture never rose to meet the province's needs. This failure led to a history of successive, and to date only partially successful, attempts at meeting these needs by alternative means.

The first agricultural schools in Bengal were established in 1922, in West Bengal at Chinsura and in East Bengal at Dacca. However, these attracted few students, largely because of the unfavorable employment conditions at the lower levels of agricultural work.\textsuperscript{15} An institute for higher education in agriculture, the first in Bengal, was founded in affiliation with Dacca University in 1941. In twenty-five years of operation it provided some 350 graduates and 30 postgraduates.

**WEST BENGAL AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

Panchayats

In both East and West Bengal the rural areas had been under Union Boards up through the period of partition and independence. In West Bengal they continued up to the late 1950s when village panchayat elections were held. At that time an *anchal* (area) panchayat displaced the Union Boards.\textsuperscript{16} In an area as politicized as West Bengal, the system of *Panchayati Raj* (a national policy emphasizing local self-determination) would have been a vehicle of convenience for the more volatile, attention-getting politics of partisan and factional strife.

When *Panchayati Raj* was announced as a national policy in 1961, West Bengal was specifically excluded because it was said to lack a panchayat tradition. Between 1958 and 1961, panchayats had been established in 96 of the 193 community development blocks, but a fear was expressed that effective democratic institutions at the local level would not be allowed to flourish.\textsuperscript{17}

The issue is largely unresolved because evidence of continuing instability and political extremism in West Bengal favors action by the forces of centralization. Not only does the state grasp at powers it might otherwise share with rural leaders, but also the central government, alarmed at political violence, may impose central rule as it did in March 1970.\textsuperscript{18}

**Intensive Agricultural Districts Program (IADP)**

Although the initial thrust in rural development following independence had been in the realm of community development, it became clear during
the course of the Second Five-Year Plan (1957–1961) that targets set for food production during the period would not be met. Sensing an emergency in the making, the government of India invited a team of specialists under Ford Foundation auspices to review the situation and make recommendations for its improvement. The team’s report inspired the noted Package Program, which was introduced into single districts in seven states. The “package” in question meant the simultaneous introduction not only of good seeds but of fertilizer, pesticides, farm implements, and other production inputs as well.

Burdwan district in West Bengal was included under the program during its second year (1962). Significant advances were made between 1962 and 1969 in increasing the irrigation potential during the principal growing seasons and in raising the proportion of land under double-cropping from seven to twenty percent. However, because the new varieties, particularly the noted IR-8, were less well adapted to the cloudy, sodden conditions of the Amon season (the principal growing season fed by monsoon rainfall) than they were to the sunny, dry season (if irrigation were available), other factors in the package held greater promise than did the seeds.

Increased fertilizer application, even on the better local varieties, seemed to hold the greatest promise during the wet season. Other obstacles stood in the way of a more widespread impact of IADP in Burdwan district. Among these were the uneven topography which made the cultivation of dwarf varieties of rice hazardous at times of flooding. Also, farms were highly fragmented and generally of uneconomic size. With a condition of high rates of land rental, it is reported that few cultivators had the means or felt incentives to invest in the Green Revolution. Cooperatives have provided little assistance in the district to the majority of agricultural workers, those with three acres of land or less, because their economic condition is so unstable that the only source of credit generally open to them is through private moneylenders. The weight of the evidence suggests that the Green Revolution is a rich man’s plum: only those with over three acres of irrigated land, owned and operated, reported increases in rice yields and greater diversification of production.

Even the political parties shunned the rural poor, at least up until the mid-1960s. And even then the Marxist parties stood to gain more political ground by promoting disaffection among the rural population than by prosecuting its cause.

Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC)

The valley of the Damodar River in West Bengal has a history of frequent flooding. The river was seriously implicated in the disastrous famine of 1943 when its waters breached the rail line that might have brought signi-
significant relief to the starving province. Because of the problems of flooding, the need for irrigation to serve agriculture, and the need for hydroelectric power to serve a growing industrial region, plans were laid in the years before partition. The valley was to be developed along lines analogous to those of the Tennessee Valley Authority of the United States. The upper valley, in Bihar, is rich in mineral resources and stood to gain as an industrial region from the development of hydroelectric power plants. The lower valley, in West Bengal, is an agricultural plain with considerable potential if flooding could be brought under control and significant irrigation facilities provided.

The disturbed political, administrative, and developmental situation at the time of partition was such that a positive program like that of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) was accepted with few reservations by the legislatures at the center and in the states of Bihar and West Bengal. Flood control, irrigation and water supply, and the production and distribution of electricity were to be the principal functions of DVC. An integrated series of dams was constructed to meet the multiple objectives of the project. During the rainy season the dams diverted excess water into their catchment areas for release during the dry season. The irrigation achievements in Bengal were only about two-thirds of the anticipated command area, due largely to the failure of Bengal government to provide connecting channels between the main canals and the farmers' fields. Eventually, the DVC did construct some of these field channels. However, these operated in such a way that the water was largely unregulated and varied perversely in direct proportion to the pace of natural rainfall.

Nonetheless, Bengal benefited greatly from the DVC because it received virtually all the advantages of flood control and most of those from irrigation. The dams were built in Bihar, where the hardships of relocation from the proposed catchment areas had to be borne by the population of that state. An ingenious set of formulas involving heavy central contributions was worked out in order to make the scheme attractive to the legislatures of both Bihar and Bengal.

The inherent autonomy of the DVC, however, went down hard in both Bengal and Bihar. Most of this animosity was jealousy at seeing an independent power operating within state territory. Coupled with this was the awkwardness in each state government's having to ask and give concessions relating to the interests of a bordering state and the central government.

In a course of events strikingly similar to the diminution of the powers of TVA and the rise of those of the participating states in the United States, Bengal and Bihar began to provide many of the services originally set up as the responsibilities of the DVC, especially the generation and distribution of electric power. What had been an attractive proposal during
the turbulent times of independence turned into a source of annoyance and embarrassment to state leaders as conditions stabilized and each state acquired the effective powers to assert itself in relation to the center and its neighbor. Much of this assertiveness can be laid at the door of the West Bengal State Congress party.\textsuperscript{30}

Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO)

Despite its assertiveness in the case of the semiautonomous Damodar Valley Corporation, the State of West Bengal has, in effect, declared itself incapable of coping with the city of Calcutta. It turned to outside sources in the central government and international aid-giving agencies for the technical skills and financial support of a major regional planning effort.\textsuperscript{31}

The allocations under the Third Five-Year Plan, the U.S. Food for Peace program, the Ford Foundation, and other organizations were substantial but the net results have been few. Certain critics feel, with some justification, that the government of West Bengal and the Calcutta Metropolitan Corporation are not taking the job of urban planning seriously enough to implement their principal recommendations.\textsuperscript{32}

In many respects Calcutta is a national phenomenon whose problems extend well beyond those of West Bengal. The former prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, pointed out in 1961 that “Calcutta is the biggest city in the country. Its problems are national problems—quite apart from problems from West Bengal, and it is necessary that something special should be done.”\textsuperscript{33} The hinterland extends hundreds of miles to the west, into an industrial region that has been characterized as the Ruhr of India. Despite the far-reaching influence of the surrounding region on the city, and vice versa, there is nothing in the Basic Development Plan for the period 1966–1986 that recognizes the need for concomitant agricultural and rural development in the region.

\textbf{East Bengal after Independence}

\textbf{Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID)}

In the unsettled conditions of postpartition East Pakistan, rural development responsibilities were in the hands of the separately established departments of government. These included agencies dealing with agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, cooperation, marketing, health, and so forth.\textsuperscript{34} Each had a hierarchical organization, uncoordinated with the hierarchies of any of the others. The problem was compounded by the paucity of technically trained personnel, who had opted for Pakistan following partition. Those personnel who were in the service of these
agencies almost to a man lacked effective knowledge and experience of meaningful rural development work.

Because of these difficulties, the government of Pakistan endeavored to build a rural development extension service that, in a single agency, would serve the needs of all the nation-building departments. As a model, the government reached back to the same precedents on which India's Community Development Program had been established. Building on those precedents and on the contemporary experience of India's Community Development Programs and the United States extension programs, Pakistan launched its own effort in June 1952—the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development program (V-AID).

In 1938 a Rural Reconstruction Department had been established in Bengal, following on pioneering rural development efforts elsewhere in undivided India during the 1920s and 1930s. However, the inappropriateness of having a development establishment separate from the nation-building departments was recognized by the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee of 1944–1945. Upon the recommendations of this committee, known also as the Rowlands Committee, rural development responsibilities were to be assigned specifically to the technical and administrative branches of the civil service and integrated into local government activities. Despite the principles emphasized at the time of the disbanding of the Rural Reconstruction Department just prior to partition, much the same kind of organization was reestablished in V-AID—largely because of the combined inability and unwillingness of the existing administrative machinery to meet the training and technical service needs for village development during the early days of independence.

Multipurpose village workers were trained at one of three original (later expanded) training institutes in East Pakistan. They were then assigned to the bottom rung of the V-AID organization. At these levels V-AID utilized specially constituted, locally elected councils of elders to legitimize and institutionalize local development efforts. A hierarchy of advisory councils with units at each administrative echelon brought representatives of the technical departments into contact with the V-AID effort. The agency itself was organized into a separate hierarchy whose chief administrator was located at the Central Ministry of Economic Affairs. The chief administrator of V-AID in East Pakistan reported to the Provincial Commissioner of the Division of Planning.

To train the middle and higher ranks of V-AID personnel, an academy was established in East (as well as in West) Pakistan. This academy, located at Comilla, began operations in 1959, at a time when V-AID was on the threshold of dissolution.

Despite the application of a great deal of dedicated professional talent
whose emotions and technical skills became wedded to the cause of rural development based on community development principles such as "self-help," "felt needs," and "local coordination," V-AID foun dred on the realities of the bureaucratic powers it sought to bypass. The technical departments were subordinated in the programs. The chief officers of the administrative districts of the civil government were involved only as members of advisory committees, and the formal rural local government bodies were not even in the picture. This de facto confrontation flared into the open as the Agriculture Department became overtly competitive and as other supporters of integrated rural development (including the Comilla Academy) set off in more promising, if only slightly less turbulent, directions.\textsuperscript{38}

In short order, V-AID was banned from working within the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Agriculture. A year later it was abolished altogether. The organization was gone but the problems remained:

When V-AID failed in its attempt at coordination the province was left with serious problems: mutually exclusive departments trying to operate separate and sometimes conflicting programs in the mofussil; a civil administration unconnected with, and often unconcerned about, development programs; and a system of local self-government badly weakened.\textsuperscript{39}

Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC)

Government decided on new endeavors to correct these problems. Despite its bureaucratic "victory" over V-AID, the Agriculture Department was still regarded as incapable of meeting the considerable needs for increasing agricultural production. The report of the Food and Agriculture Commission, released in November 1960, specifically stated that the department lacked the knowledge and facilities to do the job.\textsuperscript{40} Despite the ill-fortune that the government of Pakistan seemed to be having with attempts to bypass entrenched and ineffective units of government, it did not give up. The success it experienced with the creation in 1959 of the engineering-oriented Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA)\textsuperscript{41} led it to attempt the establishment of a semiautonomous Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC). The primary responsibility of ADC was to procure and distribute agricultural production inputs (such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and credit) and to extend knowledge through various information and training activities.

For many reasons the ADC was slow to organize. Not the least of the problems was the unwillingness of the Agriculture Department to yield to the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Commission. Instead the department continued to expand its programs in the rural areas.
Basic Democracies and the Rural Works Program

After slightly more than a decade of independence in Pakistan, martial law was proclaimed by Mohammed Ayub Khan in a bloodless coup in October 1958. The effort was principally to restore order and direction to a nation whose political scene was approaching chaos and whose economic scene was stagnating. A year later Ayub Khan promulgated the broadly innovative "Basic Democracies Order," which reorganized local government. Not only was a new form of electoral college\(^42\) organized under this order, but the system potentially became an instrument for greater local involvement in national affairs and for bringing public services closer to the rural areas and the towns.

Within the districts of East Bengal three tiers of local government were established. At the lowest level were the Union Councils. At the next higher jurisdiction, covering an administrative area of approximately one hundred square miles and a population of 150,000 to 200,000, were the Thana Councils. At each of the then seventeen districts were the District Councils. The Union Council bore a close resemblance to the Union Board set up under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919.\(^43\) The members were elected within electoral wards from population clusters of about 10,000 persons (later raised to 12,500). The members of the Union Council elected their own chairman. Although the Union Council had a long list of optional functions and an income based on land revenue, it did not in fact progress much beyond the precedents of the Union Board in the decades prior to independence and fell short of meeting contemporary local government needs.\(^44\)

Much the same could be said of the District Council, whose membership was composed of officials and representatives elected from the body of Union Council chairmen in the district. The council’s revenue base was largely a share of the land revenue, although additional taxes could be levied. With an extended list of optional functions the District Council was provided with a fairly full scope. However, in 1963 it was reported that the new District Councils were suffering under the same weaknesses—lack of planning, inefficient administration, and a shortage of funds—which had plagued the old District Boards.\(^45\)

The same could not be said of the Thana Council, especially after it became the object of intensive experimentation and development as a pilot project in the rural administration experiment of the Academy for Rural Development at Comilla. The Thana Council was an innovation without precedent at that hierarchical level. Originally established as the locus of a police station providing access to most rural areas within a walk of a few hours, the thana level of jurisdiction provided an opportunity to
deliver other public services at a point closer to the rural people and to do so in a coordinated manner. The district level had been the previous concentrated location of public services closest to the rural people. As increasing numbers of officers of the various nation-building departments were assigned to the thana level, they were organized into a thana office building constructed with funds under the Rural Works Program. At this location they could be more easily contacted by farmers and coordinated by thana-level supervisory administrators. The basic functions of the Thana Council were envisioned as planning and coordination.

Unlike the Union and District Councils, there were no separate revenue sources available to the Thana Council other than grants from higher levels. This was fitting because the council, per se, had no executive functions beyond those which its members could exercise in their regular roles as government officers or as chairmen of the Union Councils within the thana.

The chairman of the Thana Council was the subdivisional officer (SDO), a young man near the beginning of his career in the higher civil service, the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). The SDO was at the same time chairman of all the Thana Councils within his subdivision and was thus available only intermittently. The day-to-day affairs of the Thana Council were in the hands of the circle officer, an appointed official in the provincial civil service, the East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS). The appointed members of the Thana Council were thana-level government officers representing the administrative and technical cadres of the various government departments. The elected members were the chairmen of the Union Councils within the thana.

Several levels of administrative status and jurisdiction were represented at a fully attended Thana Council meeting, as were several levels of social station and background. This fact, coupled with the proximity to both rural people and government services, made it a natural object for experimentation. One challenge was to devise ways in which to make the Thana Council a cohesive functioning unit. Another was to fit the aptitudes of the council to development needs.

Government officers were not accustomed to coordinating with each other, much less with elected rural leaders. The early meetings of the pilot Thana Council in Comilla were marked by erratic attendance and confusion over roles and status. A need for training and for a functional raison d'etre had to be filled. Intrinsically the members of the council were not rural development planners, and their entire experience was contrary to the norm of coordinated and cooperative rural involvement.

One role that did seem to come more easily to the local council than any other was the management of rural public works projects at low cost. This
discovery came at a time when the U.S. Food for Peace program had provided surplus food grain to Pakistan. The leader of the Harvard Development Advisory Service Team in Pakistan suggested that a rural works program be attempted in East Pakistan on a pilot basis in Comilla Thana.\(^{40}\) The pilot project adapted a rural planning device from Malaysia—the Red Book, which was a series of map worksheets and detailed instructions. The elected and appointed members of the Thana Council worked under the guidance of the circle officer, who had been through a special training course at the Academy for Rural Development. They prepared base maps of the existing drainage canal and road network and a series of annual plan maps that were designed to meet the priority needs for drainage canals, culverts, ridges, and village roads over a period of five or more years. Because similar plans were being concurrently laid for rural works adapted to the jurisdiction of the Union Council and the District Council, extended coordination of plans was undertaken between hierarchical levels. Technical engineering opinions were provided under a mandate to the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). The methods for identifying projects, for assigning them priorities, for collating Thana Council and Union Council projects, for securing technical opinions from such agencies as WAPDA, for training local project committees (chaired by Union Council members) to supervise local labor hired during the dry season, for using Food for Peace wheat in partial payment of wages (a practice displaced in later years by wage payments using proceeds from government sales of the wheat), for measuring physical accomplishments, for keeping records and accounts, and for establishing working relationships between government officers and council members—all were incorporated into a manual of procedures. This manual became the basis for the training program and operational guidance of the Rural Works Program as it was expanded from its pilot phase to all of East Pakistan and subsequently to the whole country. Not only did the Rural Works Program provide a rural infrastructure;\(^{50}\) it also gave local officials and elected leaders experience and confidence in managing public affairs in coordination with other units of local government and with the available technical public services.\(^{51}\)

The Comilla Pilot Project in Rural Cooperatives

An alternative approach to rural cooperatives was experimented with on a significant scale in Comilla Thana by the Academy for Rural Development beginning in 1960.\(^{52}\) Although variously stated in various sources, the objectives of the project eventually worked out to be:

1. The *organization* of economically dispersed small holders, share-
croppers, and laborers who were vulnerable in their dealings with commercial traders, moneylenders, landlords, and employers.

2. The training of rural people in technical vocational skills, problem-solving, management procedure, hygiene, literacy, and related developmentally relevant knowledge, attitudes, and skills which were unavailable from traditional sources in village society.

3. The provision of supportive services especially for the promotion of productivity and income. These included organizational and production planning assistance, access to credit and other production inputs, to technical information, and to stable markets.

4. The constructive guidance through discipline, both in the form of positive inducements such as access to the services mentioned above, and to a certain extent in the form of negative sanctions. These controls conserve scarce resources and provide mutual protection against individual vagaries.\textsuperscript{53}

The project's intent was to give rural people the capacity to participate in shaping their own futures and to enter into collaborative relations with government and other institutions in effecting developments that were beyond the capacity of government alone.

The Comilla pilot project in rural cooperatives comprised a system of village-level cooperative societies integrated under a central cooperative association which acted as a servicing headquarters for all the cooperatives within the hundred or so square miles of the thana. The basic unit was the village-based cooperative, which was integrated into the cooperative system. Although each cooperative was formed voluntarily by a group of local farmers, they obligated themselves to follow a program of activities that took full advantage of the services provided through the central cooperative association.

A primary society had about forty members who selected their own leaders. The membership was expected to meet weekly under the coordination of the manager to discuss financial management, technical training in agriculture, and other matters. Each member was also expected to purchase at least one ten-rupee share in the central association each year and to make a small savings account deposit every week (the minimum amount was decided by each local society—usually a quarter of a rupee or more). Each week the manager of the cooperative society visited the central association's headquarters to deposit these funds and have them recorded. While there he attended training classes on seasonally important agricultural topics. Another member of the village cooperative, selected to be the "model farmer," attended regular training sessions held at conveniently located centers in the rural areas. These two officers of the
primary society acted as de facto agents in their home villages, leading training sessions at each weekly meeting and using their own landholdings as demonstrations.

Credit, power pump irrigation, tractor cultivation, the supply of improved varieties of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, and the processing and marketing of farm products were among the services provided by the central association. The members of the local cooperatives were expected to make the fullest possible use of these services. The amount which could be borrowed by members of a local cooperative depended on the total savings of the group together with the amount they held as shares in the central association, and qualified by an appraisal of the functional viability and vigor of the cooperative. The loans were allocated within the society by the managing committee according to a general production plan in which the purpose of each member’s loan was stated. The financial arrangement for savings and loans constituted a rural banking system.

In time, nonagricultural cooperatives were organized in Comilla Thana among local craftsmen, cycle rickshaw operators, and others (many of whom were landless laborers). As the membership of these groups increased it became necessary for two intervening “federations” to be organized between the primary cooperatives and the central association: one for agricultural cooperatives and one for nonagricultural (special) cooperatives. Each federation maintained accountants and inspectors who acted as tutors and overseers of the progress of the societies, the accuracy of their records, and the progress of individual members. These inspectors kept a lookout for weaknesses and breakdowns in the system. Difficulties which the inspectors could not resolve on the spot during their field visits were referred to the appropriate federation for corrective action. The federations could, if necessary, exert pressure for compliance by withholding essential services or, as a last resort, they could sell collateral assets to recover defaulted loans—although this was rarely necessary.

The development of the cooperative project was tied in with the academy’s pilot project in rural administration. The rural cooperative system was envisioned as an integral element in the Thana Training and Development Center. The support was mutual, since the cooperatives bolstered the government’s rural development activities and the local officials served as trainers at the weekly classes for managers and others.

The expansion of the pilot project beyond the initial experimental area of Comilla Thana took place in several stages. In mid-1963, three thana projects were set up, one in each of three other divisions of the Province of East Pakistan. These were located adjacent to training institutes operated by the Department of Basic Democracies and Local Government. Key staff members underwent a six months’ course of train-
ing at Comilla. These principal staff members, once they were posted, continued to coordinate through a specially designated supervisory officer located at Comilla and through attendance at monthly coordination conferences. Following a pattern similar to the three earlier expansion thanas, the Comilla model was readapted in 1965 in seven other thanas of Comilla district. Because the Comilla project was a pilot operation, the expansion projects were administered by the Directorate of Agriculture and later by the Agricultural Development Corporation. Collaborative arrangements existed between these agencies and the Comilla Academy, especially with respect to training and coordination.

Although numerous difficulties were encountered in attempting to implement these expansions of the original model, there was considerable progress. As of June 1968, there were 339 primary cooperative societies in Comilla Thana, of which 78 were nonagricultural. As of June 1967, less than two percent of the loans made between 1961 and 1967 were overdue. In mid-1968 there were 673 primary agricultural societies in the three expansion thanas launched in mid-1963, with a loan repayment rate of ninety-two percent. In the seven thanas elsewhere in Comilla district into which the Comilla-type cooperative model had been expanded in 1966, a total of 948 primary societies had been established and a loan repayment rate of eighty-two percent was reported.

Thana Irrigation Plan (TIP)

At this time expansion was methodically continuing into the remaining thirteen thanas of Comilla district, as well as into other areas on a modified basis. However, questions were also being raised regarding the pace of rural transformation. The Comilla-type cooperative system was a relatively sophisticated complex requiring considerable time to establish and institutionalize a viable network of agricultural and nonagricultural societies linked to a central servicing headquarters and to the agencies of the civil administration.

As an alternative to pursuing the strategy of first building up fairly sophisticated system of cooperative societies to spread agricultural modernization and technological change, a reverse procedure was suggested. It was proposed to utilize the method of planning through the Thana Councils that had been successfully worked out under the Rural Works Program as a device for planning the installation for power pump facilities and irrigation channels on a broad scale. Irrigation was seen as the chief technological requirement for rapid agricultural change under monsoon conditions which included a long dry season. Pump and motor sets were to be integrated with special local farmer organizations that could be set up as irrigation groups. Their relatively simple structure made the irrigation groups more amenable to rapid expansion. This program was
accepted by government and formalized as the Expanded Works Program—Thana Irrigation Plan (TIP), with a target of installing forty thousand pumps in the province over a five-year period.

In addition to the complex of supporting institutions provided locally through the planning and coordination of the Thana Council, administrative support at the highest level was secured through a provincial coordinating committee that included the chief administrators of the Department of Local Government, the Agricultural Directorate, the Water and Power Development Authority, and the Agricultural Development Corporation. Agricultural credit was introduced into the irrigation program with the support of the Agricultural Development Bank, the Provincial Cooperative Bank, and the medium of Tacavi loans under the revenue administration. The sequence of activities was leading ultimately to the integration of other services into the program.

The growing perception of the comprehensive nature of rural development needs, and the existence of encouraging demonstrations of other integrated programs, led in 1969 to the placement of a formal proposal before the Pakistan Planning Commission to establish multifaceted rural development cooperative projects in all the thanas of East Bengal along lines adapted from the Comilla experiment.

It was at approximately this time that natural calamity and civil unrest swept the province. However, it did not fail the notice of the administrators of martial law that the areas where the projects were established had gone through the period with greater stability, on the whole, than had most other areas. Progress was suspended because of the worsening political situation. War broke out in March 1971, making constructive action impossible.

Reflections on Rural Public Policy

Rural development policy in Bengal must cope with some concerns that are unique to the region and with others that are broadly shared with other densely populated agrarian areas. The density of population, the low levels of education, the incidence of disease, the vulnerability to a dramatic climate, and the shallow governmental capacity in the nation-building public services are problems experienced in many other parts of the world. But the specific ways in which these problems appear in Bengal are, of course, unique. Also unique is the mystique of being a “Bengali,” a member of a large linguistic, cultural, and historical entity that is perceived internally and externally as distinct from other areas. Despite these complicating factors, and many others, public policy for rural development will have to deal with at least six basic issues.

First, the rural scene is a “system” of broad relationships that, at least in concept, need to be perceived as integrated. Such a perspective indicates
the need to gather information, select goals, mobilize resources and interests around these goals, and plan a foundation of nationhood that can be shared. This approach highlights a need for integrated local and central planning. The administrative services of government must also be integrated with private, commercial, and social interests. Dynamic stability and leadership at the highest levels are essential.

Second, investments in flood control, irrigation, transportation, electric power, public buildings, and other facilities will need to be made with foresight and determination well beyond the demand for short-term economic benefits.

Third, investments in agricultural research and extension (including crop and animal husbandry, rural credit and banking, special education, and the like) will have to be made so as to take advantage of international developments and to involve the relevant elements in the rural areas.

Fourth, rural governing institutions will have to be developed according to the goals that have been selected. Rural planning and public facilities bodies will be necessary to manage local irrigation, marketing, banking, credit, education, and public works in collaboration with institutions at higher levels.

Fifth, revenue and other fiscal institutions—including competent assessment and collection agencies as well as policy- and law-making institutions—will have to be developed to build a system of resource mobilization and allocation. Poverty and low productivity mask the rich resource base of Bengal, which could be developed.

Sixth, a flexible approach needs to be fostered in the reformation or design of rural policies and institutions. The pilot projects at Comilla and elsewhere offer hard evidence to government that standing practice can be modified.

The tasks faced by any government are immense, and the governments in Bengal have been deeply involved in these tasks with the help of, and in spite of, their domestic and international well-wishers and critics. Although inevitably flavored with utopian sentiment, the cases I have discussed offer lessons that should not go unnoticed.

NOTES


4. Rashid, op. cit., p. 207; West Bengal State Statistical Bureau, op. cit., part 1, table 10.1, p. 28.


11. Ibid., p. 10.


17. Ibid., p. 36.

18. Frankel, op. cit., pp. 188–189.


21. Ibid., p. 163.

22. Ibid., pp. 163–169.


26. Ibid., p. 20.

27. Frankel, op. cit., p. 158.


29. Ibid., pp. 89–95.

30. Ibid., p. 127.


33. As quoted in Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, op. cit., preface.

35. The noted work of F. L. Brayne in Gurgaon district (Punjab) while he was deputy commissioner, of Spencer Hatch in South Travancore, of Rabindranath Tagore at Shriniketan, and of Malcom Darling, although impermanent, was influential on much of the work taken up by governments at a later date.

36. Tepper, op. cit., p. 104.


40. As cited in Tepper, op. cit., p. 21.


43. Tepper, op. cit., p. 106.


47. Akhter Hameed Khan, “Note Prepared for Mr. Azfar, Chief Secretary, Government of East Pakistan, May 1959,” as reproduced in Mohsen, op. cit., appendix C-1, pp. 88–89.


51. Tepper, op. cit., p. 119.

52. The progress of this experiment has been widely reported on. Primary sources are in the annual reports of the cooperative project published by the Academy for Rural Development beginning in 1961; additional data are collected in Arthur F. Raper and others, *Rural Development in Action: The Comprehensive Experiment at Comilla, East Pakistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).


55. Ibid., pp. 238–239.

56. Ibid., table D, p. 308.

57. Ibid., p. 74.

58. Ibid., p. 236.

59. Ibid., p. 241.
A Bibliographic Essay on Bengal Studies in The United States

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In May 1972, at the Eighth Annual Bengal Studies Conference in Toronto, some fifty scholars participated in seven panels dealing with a variety of topics ranging from Brahma contact with Unitarianism in the nineteenth century to current priorities in Bangladesh. As with every other conference since the earliest one at Michigan State in 1965, ideas were hotly discussed, and even mediocre papers with vaguely formed issues evoked sharp controversy, while clarity and academic detachment remained the two scholarly virtues conspicuously absent during the proceedings. And, as always, each American participant succumbed to that indefinable, indefensible, and indefatigable spirit or mystique of Bengal which in the face of chronic disaster—from the partition of 1905 to the bloody birth of Bangladesh—has produced a rapturous ambivalence between love and hate, optimism and pessimism, loyalty and alienation.

To understand the progress of Bengal studies in the United States during the last decade, one must somehow account for that zealous and irrational appreciation of Bengal by American academics who are generally conservative in bestowing affection, rational by profession, and relatively dull in choice of lifestyle. The Bengal known to American scholars who have lived and researched there over the last decade is without doubt the most politically unstable and the most violent state in South Asia, the most troubled socially, and the least progressive economically. The great Bengali urban metropolis of Calcutta (where most of the Americans under consideration have lived for a year or more) has the distinction among Indian cities of having been treated by the world press in a consistently derogatory manner as the "city of dreadful night." Calcutta's image and prospects were perhaps best summed up by a sympathetic New York Times
correspondent a few years ago in an article entitled "Can India Survive Calcutta?".

Nevertheless, with few exceptions, most of the graduate students who were trained as Bengal specialists between 1958 and 1964 have persisted in their chosen field. Edward Dimock, who inspired the majority of them in a seminar on the cultural and literary history of Bengal at Chicago, has attributed the enthusiasm for Bengali culture to the attraction of the language, to Bengal's "long and lush . . . literary tradition," to Bengal's "tremendous fund of source material," and to Bengal's rich and diversified history. Moreover, Dimock contended that American scholars with area studies background and with competence in a modern South Asian language had become impatient with "simplistic thinking" about the "macrocosm" of India and were instead probing deeply into the "microcosm" of regional cultures. In Dimock's words, "we must begin to examine in necessarily minute detail the single strands which make up the complex fabric of India." Each region of the subcontinent has unique aspects which are in "themselves fascinating and highly individual, and as such worthy of study and understanding." Parochialism, however, is not the objective of the American student of Bengal: "it is through the unit that we are attempting to approach the totality."

Part of the emotional commitment to Bengal, therefore, is to be explained as a consequence of an area studies training and an emphasis on regional languages and cultures. Bengal happened to be selected as the first experiment to justify the hypothesis and one can only imagine the excitement of the pioneers whose articles and monographs opened a virtual new world. In an editorial preface to the second volume of the Bengal studies proceedings, I noted that:

In May, 1966, the University of Missouri played host to the second annual conference on Bengal Studies which had convened to discuss "Bengal Regionalism: Origins and Conceptual Problems." There was much confusion and uncertainty about the validity of intensive regional studies in those days and we were often criticized by well-meaning scholars who were doing precisely the same thing for Punjab, Maharashtra, and the Dravidian South. Though most of us were quick to defend the regional approach, we were conceptually unsure of ourselves. Evidently we were not alone that year in trying to avoid a crisis of scholarly identity between India and Bengal, Maharashtra, or the Punjab. A month earlier, Robert I. Crane had assembled South Asian notables of every region and discipline at Duke University to inquire into "Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies."

ACADEMIC PROFILE OF THE BENGAL SPECIALIST

This essay deals with a selection of the published work of fourteen scholars—thirteen Americans and one acculturated New Zealander—who in
the estimation of their peers have made solid contributions to Bengal studies. Who are these persons? Where were they educated and what was their intellectual orientation to South Asia? What are their disciplines and their general characteristics as scholars of Bengal studies? Interestingly, the two senior scholars who published earliest on Bengal, Edward Dimock and Stephen Hay, were Harvard Ph.D.'s. Dimock worked in the Department of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, whereas Hay was a product of the Department of History with a specialized interest in East Asia.

In the late 1950s both these men joined the University of Chicago during the period of formative growth of the university's South Asia Center. At the initiative of Myron Weiner, a political scientist specializing on India, the Bengali language was first offered at the university. The early interest in Bengal by Dimock, Hay, and Weiner explains why Chicago produced so many graduate students committed to that region of South Asia. And of those students, the majority were in history, a discipline which traditionally favored intensive area concentration. Thus among Hay's students up to 1964 were included Philip Calkins, Leonard Gordon (on leave from Harvard), Warren Gunderson, Ronald Inden, Barrie Morrison, and myself. Weiner's student of Bengal was Marcus Franda while Ralph Nicholas from anthropology was the first graduate from that department with the same regional specialization.

At the University of Pennsylvania under Norman Brown's direction, South Asia Regional Studies was established as a department offering degrees to doctoral candidates with a concentration in one of several disciplines. Rachel Van M. Baumer received her doctoral degree from this program after having studied Bengali literature with the late T. W. Clark. Blair Kling developed his interest in modern Bengali history there while studying with Holden Furber, dean of South Asian historians in America. John McLane and John Broomfield, the former an American and the latter a New Zealander, are both historians who were area-trained abroad. McLane is a graduate of British universities whereas Broomfield studied at Australian National University.

Among the pioneers of Bengal studies over the last decade, historians predominate. Of the fourteen, ten are trained historians while two others are strongly influenced by history in their work. This stress has made most of the Bengal scholars conscious of the temporal dimension, of processes and stages of growth and decline, of the need to view Bengali society and culture dynamically rather than statically. Most conferences and seminars on Bengal have been organized chronologically around major historical periods, and one of the leading questions that invariably emerges at such gatherings deals with the problem of change and continuity in Bengali culture.
On the other hand, a great emphasis on the little tradition of Bengal as against the great tradition of India, the relativistic bias of some anthropologists at Chicago, and the inevitable consequences of regional identity have modified the characteristic historicity of the group by stressing the inner structure of the culture more than the irruptive external forces and movements impinging on it. Those Bengal scholars who have sought a key to the unique culture of the region have tended to treat historical changes as irrelevant happenings which hardly touch the hard core of the closed system.

Nonetheless, the Bengal specialist has not gone to ideological extremes in his work. Other influences and considerations have operated in the field. If, for example, historians predominate among Bengal specialists, it is the modernists who predominate among historians. This tendency may be explained as a result of a happy coalescence of interests between advocates of regionalism in South Asia and representatives of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare anxious to extend fellowships to students achieving linguistic competence in the crucial languages of Asia. The National Defense Education Act center idea favored Bengali or Marathi or Hindi because they were the living languages of the Indian people. It is probably safe to generalize that agencies willing and able to send Americans to India or Pakistan favored proposals on problems that were of contemporary interest or at least modern in the sense of tracing the origins of present-day concerns. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that though only Nicholas and Franda among the fourteen are social scientists per se, the majority of historians are greatly influenced by social science methods and techniques.

Thus it can be said that the Bengal specialist is subject to a number of influences: historical perspective, cultural relativism, social science, and present-day concerns. Nor is it possible to establish for him any neat category between the social sciences and humanities. As area specialist exposed to both approaches and as historians who by the nature of their craft must belong to both camps, Bengal scholars have thus far proved a mixed bag indeed.

An Analysis of Bengal Scholarship in America

Probably the first work of consequence by an American scholar of Bengal appeared in 1963 with the publication of Edward Dimock’s translation of Bengali tales from court and village in a volume entitled The Thief of Love. Dimock had three purposes in bringing out the volume: to justify the regional approach to South Asia by showing “that there is a good deal of enjoyment as well as enlightenment to be had from study of the regional literatures of South Asia”; to illuminate the medieval period of
India, "that period from the thirteenth through the eighteenth centuries"; and to meet a need clearly felt at the University of Chicago: "there are precious few translations from the literature of the medieval period of any South Asian language."

Dimock's volume, as he described it, was a pioneer effort to open up a new world or perhaps rediscover it. "When we considered India at all," he wrote, "most people of my generation, growing up in the thirties and forties, thought of it in terms of the British Empire." It was not the real India that people conjured up in their minds but a series of images generated by popular literature and the cinema. Said Dimock, "India was a British land, and her culture, represented to us in movie versions of Kipling stories, was that of Britain, re-enacted in a tropical and foreign land." The second set of images Dimock sought to counter was that of the nineteenth-century Orientalist scholar who conceived India largely in terms of the Sanskrit-oriented culture or great tradition of the Indian macrocosm. It was Dimock's conviction that by moving away from the British and Orientalist perceptions of India and by moving into the popular cultures and popular languages of the regions, a new and richer dimension of understanding about India could be achieved.

Dimock's partiality for medieval Bengali language and literature and his emphasis on the interaction of the classical great tradition (Aryan) with the regional traditions (Dravidian) had important implications which later Bengal scholars did not always accept. Dimock argued in his introduction that Bengali stood to Sanskrit rather much as Italian did to Latin. Surely if the objective of the scholar were to explore Italian history and culture, he would prefer to work with Italian sources rather than Latin. But then Dimock's analogy took a certain twist when he referred to a Bengali literary tradition that has been "unbroken from the ninth or tenth century Buddhist esoteric texts called caryā-padas, to the present." The first difficulty was Dimock's overly close identification between the regional language of Bengal spoken today and its linguistic and literary phase of development during the middle ages. The second difficulty was that he did not carry the analogy between Bengali and European languages far enough in the historical perspective of change and continuity. Is the language of the Italian people today the language of the pre-Renaissance period? Do the English people today speak in the idiom of Chaucer? As for Bengal, is the literature of the Bengali people today really the same as the literature of the pre-Muslim period? Is the Bengali of Caṇḍidāsa the same Bengali of Rabindranath Tagore? Dimock's stress on origins and the unbroken continuity of a tradition thus turned the quest inward in the direction of a closed inner core of the Bengali culture which, it was believed, remained
pure and immune from revolution, invasion, and conquest—and from the processes of modernization which had been transforming Western literary traditions for centuries since the Renaissance.

Not surprising, therefore, is the fact that Dimock chose as his last translation chronologically in The Thief of Love Bharat Chandra's Vidyā-Sundara, composed sometime before 1760. The British began to dominate Bengal about then: the victory at Plassey was in 1756; the selection of Calcutta as capital was in 1772; the development of a new Bengali prose style was dated from 1800 with the establishment of the College of Fort William; and the reform work of Rammohun Roy, “father of modern India,” has generally been set at about 1815. From then on, a radically new Bengali language and literature emerged through textbook translations, journalism, novels, short stories, poetry, and drama. The writers were among the newly risen Western-educated intelligentsia whose creative outburst and ideological pursuits on behalf of modernism and a new cultural identity have come to be known as the Bengal renaissance.

In 1965, sandwiched between articles in Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization, there appeared a lone piece on Indian modernization by Stephen Hay: “Western and Indigenous Elements in Modern Indian Thought: The Case of Rammohun Roy.” With Hay, among Americans interested in Bengal, Dimock’s quest backward in time to understand continuity was shifted to the future to understand change. And instead of Dimock’s preoccupation with the sources of the inner culture, Hay addressed himself to the study of Bengal in interaction with the Western world. “All through the non-Western world in recent centuries,” wrote Hay, “the pace of change has been vastly accelerated by contact and conflict with the expanding society and culture of the modern West.”

Hay too conceived of himself as a pioneer, not merely of discovering new facts about Bengal but of contributing new ideas to the evolving conceptual scheme on the problem of Asian modernity in the context of cultural encounter and accommodation with the West. He said: “Our problem, then, is to create and refine a conceptual framework for the study of change in non-Western civilizations, within which indigenous and Western, traditional and modern elements can be analyzed and meaningfully related to each other.”

Hay’s choice of Bengal as his region of inquiry apparently did not stem from any strong commitment to the language and culture. “Nowhere in India were Western influences stronger, and Indian responses more vigorous, than in the region where the British planted their capital: Bengal.” This was Hay’s justification for selection of venue. It was Hay, while depicting the new class of upper-caste “Hindu gentry” responding favorably
to the "cultural traditions of their new rulers," who first coined the term bhadrakok\(^\text{18}\) as a conceptual device for comprehending the Bengali elite under British colonialism and imperialism.

Rammohun Roy, born in 1772, twelve years after Bhāratachandra's death, was chosen by Hay because he was the "first Indian intellectual seriously to study the civilization of the West."\(^\text{19}\) Moreover, Rammohun expressed in his writings "the fundamental ideas on the nature and relationship of Indian and Western society and culture whose implications have been worked out by a succession of later thinkers and reformers, and are still being worked out today."\(^\text{20}\) Therefore, by studying Rammohun one could learn something significant not merely about Bengal but also about "the nature and relationship of indigenous and Western, traditional and modern elements in nineteenth and twentieth century Indian thought."\(^\text{21}\)

The importance of this article by Hay and of his general approach to the history of Bengal is that it cleared away many of the Eurocentric attitudes about modernity in South Asia and opened new vistas for dealing with the general problem in a more objective, scientific, and sophisticated manner. In point of fact, Hay never offered anything new about Rammohun or about the Bengal of Rammohun's time. In the article, available information on Rammohun was used to advance an idea and to promote interest in a valuable line of questions. Through Rammohun, for example, Hay finally worked out a definition of modernization: "a continuing process of improvement directed toward the achievement of this-worldly enlightenment and well-being through the sustained and systematic application of reason."\(^\text{22}\) Hay's conclusion that Rammohun was a modernizer of his own tradition rather than a westernizer was no less important in implication than his conclusion that the impact of British intrusion in Bengal did in fact constitute a watershed between tradition and modernity in South Asia:

Westerners . . . brought to South Asia traditions of modernization which have transformed the views of Hindu and Muslim intellectuals toward their own traditions, making it impossible for them to return to their pre-modern, or traditionalist, orthodoxies. It is only a question of time until creative individuals come forward to continue the work pioneered by Rammohun Roy of selecting, reinterpreting, and integrating traditions from many civilizations, within the framework neither of traditionalism, nor of revivalism, but of continuing cultural modernization.\(^\text{29}\)

In 1966 two rather different books on Bengal were published: Edward Dimock's The Place of the Hidden Moon, and The Blue Mutiny by Blair Kling. Both had been doctoral dissertations, Dimock's dealing with erotic
mysticism in the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā cult of Bengal and Kling's dealing with the Indigo Disturbances in Bengal between 1859 and 1862. In terms of the problem of continuity and change in Bengal, Dimock was clearly reinforcing his earlier work by steeping himself in the literary and religious tradition of Vaiṣṇavism as expressed in the sixteenth century during the era of Caitanya and his disciples. Kling, on the other hand, dealt directly and effectively with changing agrarian patterns as a result of British intrusion and responses to it by Bengali cultivators, zamindars, and the urbanized intelligentsia of Calcutta.

Dimock's sources for The Place of the Hidden Moon were mostly Bengali and Sanskrit texts which he employed laboriously and expertly as building blocks in constructing as it were the architecture of Bengali culture. To be sure, Dimock established a comparative bridge between leading themes of Bengali Vaiṣṇavism and similar themes in the European medieval tradition—as, for example, the existence among Christian and Hindu poets of an apparent parodox between the spiritual "sacred" and the carnal "profane."²⁴ The attempt to reconcile love of spirit and love of flesh as two warring intellectual or religious principles was, in Dimock's opinion, not a cultural peculiarity but "a human peculiarity" (neither East nor West).²⁵ This applied to the "two essential phases or characteristics of love, union and separation," which were human and not cultural.²⁶ Wrote Dimock:

In Bernard's image, the soul "desires" to be united with the Christ, and this statement emphasizes that the two are separate. It is this aspect of the image which is most usual to Christian, and I might add to orthodox Vaiṣṇava, poets, although the pain of separation always suggests the joy of union. For love in separation is pure love, spiritual love.²⁷

These comparative assessments, especially the subsequent subtleties about love and marriage in the two great traditions of religious poetry, are extremely sensitive and useful both in comparative mysticism and in comparative medieval religious systems. But Dimock's purpose in all this, it seems to me, was not to break down discrete systems as a universalist but to win recognition and equality for a Bengali tradition by showing its functional equivalent in the hallowed heritage of the Western tradition. Thus Dimock argued effectively that the Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā combination of sacred and profane love is neither uniquely the manifestation of a non-Christian heathen faith nor to be "passed off as the product of a primitive mentality."²⁸

Dimock's monograph represented one of the most sensitive and inspired attempts to resurrect a medieval tradition of India done in the twentieth century. It was also a masterful attempt to rectify a false image of both Sahajiyās and Vaiṣṇavas allegedly using religion as a pretext for orgies of
self-gratification. Dimock, for instance, made an early and careful distinction between kāma and prema (carnal and spiritual love, respectively) as applied to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme in Bengali poetry:

True love is prema, the love that Rādhā and the Gopīs had for Kṛṣṇa, the love that the true worshipper emulates, which, when he has realized himself as Kṛṣṇa and his partner as Rādhā, he could not help emulating. In his attitude and in his worship there can be no trace of kāma, of carnal desire, of desire for the satisfaction of the self; kāma, unless it is transformed into true love, prema, leads not to joy, but to misery and hell. 29

The world Blair Kling created in absorbing narrative style in The Blue Mutiny was totally different from Dimock’s medieval age centering about the great reformer Caitanya. Reading Kling’s book dispels doubts that British intrusion materially changed Bengali life and society. Kling’s was the first monograph by an American that dealt in large part with the rural history of Bengal under the British. In it he traced the rise of the indigo plantation system from 1802 through its golden age as a profit-making business (1834–1847) to its decline and collapse in the 1850s and 1860s. One segment of the book contains the story of nonofficial European planters, a story that is often ignored in the history of the colonial experience. The fact that by 1860 these planters had bought two-thirds of the land in Nadia district suggests how powerful they had become. The Blue Mutiny also tells the story of the zemindars, or native landowners, who competed with the Europeans. Above all it tells the story of the cultivators of indigo, their trials and tribulations, their leaders during the rebellion. Finally it tells the story of sympathetic Europeans and the Calcutta intelligentsia who joined forces against violence, coercion, and exploitation in the plantations.

Kling argued that the Indigo Rebellion was an important event in Bengali history for at least three reasons: first, the Government of India Act XI (1859) led to a full investigation of plantation abuses and provided legal options for the oppressed peasant and enabled the cultivator to “grasp the concept of lawful rights” with the result that they became “enthusiastic supporters of the legal process”; second, it provided the Calcutta intelligentsia with the experience of “applied techniques of political agitation” which they would later use in the nationalist struggle; and third, it helped give “rise among the intelligentsia to an idealization of the rustics.” 31 Besides opening a field in Bengal studies on resistance movements, Kling’s important contribution was in his objective treatment of the facts—which made some Indian zemindars look as evil as did Europeans when portrayed by nationalists, and made European officials and magistrates appear much less imperious and unconcerned than when depicted by their own countrymen during the Victorian era. Kling’s strict
adherence to facts raises the question: Would Indians have done any differently in the position of the planters?

In 1967, the Asian Studies Center of Michigan State University published the first set of papers of the Bengal Studies Group which had met two years earlier in East Lansing. The subject of the conference was “Bengal: Literature and History.” Following the direction Bengal studies were taking in America, the papers were divided by Dimock, the editor, into the medieval period and the period of the nineteenth century and after. The writers had been asked to use literary sources for the study of Bengal’s cultural history.

The medieval papers included Dimock’s study “The Ideal Man in Society in Vaiṣṇava and Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā Literature,” a translation of “Two Autobiographical Accounts from Middle Bengali Literature” by Wayne Kilpatrick, and a study of “The Hindu Chiefdom in Middle Bengali Literature” by Ronald Inden. Inden’s piece is of special interest because this was his earliest product as a student of social history and as a follower of Dimock seeking the true Bengal in the middle ages. From Bengali sources entirely, Inden masterfully reconstructed the “inner” political history of Bengal in the seventeenth century. The term inner is used advisedly here because Inden went beyond the usual level of Mogul imperial or regional Muslim dynastic history to the level of actual control by a number of independent and semi-independent rajas or zemindars.

According to Inden, though the Moguls conquered Bengal, problems of communication and transport compelled them to delegate actual power to the local chiefs. But to Inden, concerned less with such “passive external factors” and more with the culture pattern and Bengali value system, the real question was this: What were the “more ‘active’ internal factors relating to political organization and activity within the chiefdom itself that from the point of view of the inhabitants living inside the chiefdom made it a permanent political institution?” Inden answered his question by setting the organization and functions of the chief’s political system (rājya) against a close study of the structural components which made up the chiefdom. Thus there was the political system itself, the territory or deśa, and the hierarchy of social groups or samāja. All these components were pulled together in a complex economic network based largely on agriculture—paddy cultivation—as the main source of wealth. The social system comprised the caste groups who according to Inden were dominated by the same three upper-caste groups of contemporary Bengal: “the Brāhmaṇ-priests, pandits, and preservers of Hindu tradition; the Baidyas-physicians; and the Kāyasthas-officials and landholders.” Inden, then, from a medieval text, listed the lower specialist castes.

Inden’s leading conclusion, perhaps, was that the whole system was held
without significant natural rainfall, and is a time of serious unemployment for most farmers. Temperatures in Bengal are conducive to farming throughout the year.

In East Bengal rice and jute are the two principal crops. The major rice season (Amon) is dependent on the monsoon rains, and it is during this season that the vast majority (about eighty-three percent) of the country's rice output is produced. Approximately the same proportion holds true for West Bengal. Jute is a much more important crop in the east than it is in the west. In East Bengal about a million tons are produced annually; in West Bengal the figure is closer to forty thousand tons. Other crops of importance throughout Bengal are wheat and barley, beans, potatoes, sugarcane, pulses and oilseeds, and a number of spices.

With high population density the average farm is quite small. In East Bengal the average farm is reported as 3.5 acres, with over half the farms in holdings of 2.5 acres or less. Only 0.4 percent of the holdings are over 25 acres.

Data for five villages in the Burdwan district in West Bengal indicate that forty-one percent of the landholdings were less than three acres. However, over half the families in these villages were without land and participated in agriculture either as laborers or as sharecroppers.

The Company and Permanent Settlement

When the British East India Company began its operations in Bengal in the latter half of the seventeenth century, its position was tenuous and costly. By a series of steps the Company sought to establish itself and to obtain revenues with which to support its expanded operations. In 1698 it obtained the revenue collection rights to three towns adjacent to the original settlement and, having inserted itself into the revenue system of the Mogul Emperor Aurangzeb as a zamindar, proceeded to expand its control. After a colorful series of intrigues, skirmishes, and battles among European, Mogul, and indigenous Indian authorities, tensions resolved themselves with the Company emerging as the diwan, or revenue collector, for all of Bengal including Bihar and Orissa.

As immense as was the power to which the Company acceded, it was no simple task to administer the revenue system. The British continued to operate through intermediaries until suspicions of revenue leakages and a genuine need to know the revenue capacity of the territory led them to take a direct hand in fulfilling the role of diwan. It was some twenty years, however, before a seemingly feasible method of revenue collection was worked out. It proved unsatisfactory.

In 1793, the collection of revenue was turned over to zamindars who were obliged to remit to the diwan (the East India Company) a permanently
settled cash fee. One-tenth of this amount was the zamindar's commission, plus some minor additional revenues. This system promised the British a dependable revenue base without the administrative headaches. It is also argued that the system catered to the social tastes of the directors of the Company and the governor general, Lord Cornwallis. The zamindars, who were previously only revenue collectors, now became a propertied class not unlike the English landed gentry.

The Permanent Settlement also insulated the British from the knowledge of actual conditions in rural Bengal. The rights of the zamindars were ensured so long as they transmitted the revenues on time. Village records were nonexistent, and the insecurity of tenant cultivators of the zamindari led to a gathering unrest. Cultivators were tenants at will and could be turned out without recourse.

The first attempt at ensuring the rights of at least a segment of the tenant cultivators came with the Rent Act of 1859. This act formally guaranteed the security of tenure of tenants who had been on the land continuously for at least twelve years. Although a commendable step, these guarantees really applied to only a small proportion of all cultivators. And even those with occupancy rights found themselves harassed and hounded by zamindars at other points of vulnerability. A subsequent Tenancy Act in Bengal was passed in 1885 with the objective of controlling rent and preventing indiscriminate ejection of cultivators. However, this field of legal protection was simultaneously bounded by custom and traditional practice. In evaluating changes it is hard to measure the cost of deteriorating patronage benefits in the face of enhanced formal security. This is especially true when tenant cultivators are poorly informed as to their legal rights and cannot pay for the fight to have these rights enforced.

Virtually from the outset of the Permanent Settlement there had been doubts about its effectiveness in promoting rural stability and development. For the sake of administrative convenience, the governing authority had abdicated its responsibilities for rural development, blinded itself to rural conditions, and systematically failed to realize the actual revenue potential of the land. Subinfeudation meant that several intermediaries (sometimes, dozens) stood between the actual cultivator and the zamindar.

In East Bengal it was not until May 1951 that the Permanent Settlement was abolished. At that time it was replaced by the East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act of the previous year. Under its terms the cultivator was confirmed as proprietor and was to pay his taxes directly to the government. Government soon discovered that its administrative vigor on the revenue side had gone soft. The administration has since been under considerable pressure to organize, staff, and rationalize a function it had left in the hands of others for a century and a half.
The Influence of Famine on Rural Policy

From the earliest days, variations in agricultural output per person have led to recurring periods of local scarcity and privation. Even under today's conditions, a failure in the monsoon can lead to acute food shortages and the associated rise in prices of choice food grains beyond the reach of the ordinary consumer. Recent illustrations may be found in the succession of bad crop years in India in the late 1960s.

Famine conditions are those of extreme food shortage and severe human suffering. Records differ when reported by different sources, but up to the middle of the nineteenth century one source estimates an average of one major famine every fifty years. These famines were usually confined to local areas and were primarily the result of climatic variations.

With the development of a rail network in India during the latter half of the nineteenth century and the growth in the grain trade (including export), local prices could reach famine levels well beyond the extent explainable solely by the degree of shortfall in local production, if any. As always, famines have been a combination of food shortage and lack of purchasing power among those who suffer most. A picture of profiteers, hoarding stores of grain against a speculative rise in prices, is part of the record of every scarcity over the past hundred years.

Government has shown relatively little ability to cope with this phenomenon because it attempted direct symptomatic melioration rather than an attack on root causes. Famine relief was usually some combination of food-for-work policies, direct food distribution, and control of prices and the movement of goods. However commendable as an alternative to doing nothing, such policies attacked only the evidence of problems but not their causes. Hence, the problems have tended to recur.

It was at a very late juncture that government implemented effective public policy for organizing, training, and guiding cultivators and other small operators.

In the middle of the nineteenth century there was no department of agriculture. Although a recommendation for its establishment was included in the report of the Famine Commission of 1866, it was not until after the famine of 1878 that the central administration in British India combined the idea of a central department of agriculture with the formation of similar departments in each province. Instructions were then issued to that effect.

Therefore, in 1885, Bengal established a modest department of agriculture. It was only subsequent to the famine at the turn of the century that the foundations of a regular agricultural service were laid. Nevertheless, despite the efforts to build a research and extension organization, expendi-
tures on the Agriculture Department of Bengal up to independence did not compare favorably with those in other states of British India.\textsuperscript{14}

The Agriculture Department’s research program began in 1908 during the temporary division of Bengal. In 1911, the first rice-improvement program on the Indian subcontinent was established, with a headquarters at Dacca. Despite all this, the government’s work in agriculture never rose to meet the province’s needs. This failure led to a history of successive, and to date only partially successful, attempts at meeting these needs by alternative means.

The first agricultural schools in Bengal were established in 1922, in West Bengal at Chinsura and in East Bengal at Dacca. However, these attracted few students, largely because of the unfavorable employment conditions at the lower levels of agricultural work.\textsuperscript{15} An institute for higher education in agriculture, the first in Bengal, was founded in affiliation with Dacca University in 1941. In twenty-five years of operation it provided some 350 graduates and 30 postgraduates.

**WEST BENGAL AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

**Panchayats**

In both East and West Bengal the rural areas had been under Union Boards up through the period of partition and independence. In West Bengal they continued up to the late 1950s when village panchayat elections were held. At that time an *anchal* (area) panchayat displaced the Union Boards.\textsuperscript{16} In an area as politicized as West Bengal, the system of *Panchayati Raj* (a national policy emphasizing local self-determination) would have been a vehicle of convenience for the more volatile, attention-getting politics of partisan and factional strife.

When *Panchayati Raj* was announced as a national policy in 1961, West Bengal was specifically excluded because it was said to lack a panchayat tradition. Between 1958 and 1961, panchayats had been established in 96 of the 193 community development blocks, but a fear was expressed that effective democratic institutions at the local level would not be allowed to flourish.\textsuperscript{17}

The issue is largely unresolved because evidence of continuing instability and political extremism in West Bengal favors action by the forces of centralization. Not only does the state grasp at powers it might otherwise share with rural leaders, but also the central government, alarmed at political violence, may impose central rule as it did in March 1970.\textsuperscript{18}

**Intensive Agricultural Districts Program (IADP)**

Although the initial thrust in rural development following independence had been in the realm of community development, it became clear during
the course of the Second Five-Year Plan (1957–1961) that targets set for food production during the period would not be met. Sensing an emergency in the making, the government of India invited a team of specialists under Ford Foundation auspices to review the situation and make recommendations for its improvement. The team’s report Inspired the noted Package Program, which was introduced into single districts in seven states. The “package” in question meant the simultaneous introduction not only of good seeds but of fertilizer, pesticides, farm implements, and other production inputs as well.

Burdwan district in West Bengal was included under the program during its second year (1962). Significant advances were made between 1962 and 1969 in increasing the irrigation potential during the principal growing seasons and in raising the proportion of land under double-cropping from seven to twenty percent. However, because the new varieties, particularly the noted IR-8, were less well adapted to the cloudy, sodden conditions of the Amon season (the principal growing season fed by monsoon rainfall) than they were to the sunny, dry season (if irrigation were available), other factors in the package held greater promise than did the seeds.

Increased fertilizer application, even on the better local varieties, seemed to hold the greatest promise during the wet season. Other obstacles stood in the way of a more widespread impact of IADP in Burdwan district. Among these were the uneven topography which made the cultivation of dwarf varieties of rice hazardous at times of flooding. Also, farms were highly fragmented and generally of uneconomic size. With a condition of high rates of land rental, it is reported that few cultivators had the means or felt incentives to invest in the Green Revolution. Cooperatives have provided little assistance in the district to the majority of agricultural workers, those with three acres of land or less, because their economic condition is so unstable that the only source of credit generally open to them is through private moneylenders. The weight of the evidence suggests that the Green Revolution is a rich man’s plum: only those with over three acres of irrigated land, owned and operated, reported increases in rice yields and greater diversification of production.

Even the political parties shunned the rural poor, at least up until the mid-1960s. And even then the Marxist parties stood to gain more political ground by promoting disaffection among the rural population than by prosecuting its cause.

Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC)

The valley of the Damodar River in West Bengal has a history of frequent flooding. The river was seriously implicated in the disastrous famine of 1943 when its waters breached the rail line that might have brought signi-
significant relief to the starving province. Because of the problems of flooding, the need for irrigation to serve agriculture, and the need for hydroelectric power to serve a growing industrial region, plans were laid in the years before partition. The valley was to be developed along lines analogous to those of the Tennessee Valley Authority of the United States. The upper valley, in Bihar, is rich in mineral resources and stood to gain as an industrial region from the development of hydroelectric power plants. The lower valley, in West Bengal, is an agricultural plain with considerable potential if flooding could be brought under control and significant irrigation facilities provided.

The disturbed political, administrative, and developmental situation at the time of partition was such that a positive program like that of the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC) was accepted with few reservations by the legislatures at the center and in the states of Bihar and West Bengal. Flood control, irrigation and water supply, and the production and distribution of electricity were to be the principal functions of DVC. An integrated series of dams was constructed to meet the multiple objectives of the project. During the rainy season the dams diverted excess water into their catchment areas for release during the dry season. The irrigation achievements in Bengal were only about two-thirds of the anticipated command area, due largely to the failure of Bengal government to provide connecting channels between the main canals and the farmers' fields. Eventually, the DVC did construct some of these field channels. However, these operated in such a way that the water was largely unregulated and varied perversely in direct proportion to the pace of natural rainfall.

Nonetheless, Bengal benefited greatly from the DVC because it received virtually all the advantages of flood control and most of those from irrigation. The dams were built in Bihar, where the hardships of relocation from the proposed catchment areas had to be borne by the population of that state. An ingenious set of formulas involving heavy central contributions was worked out in order to make the scheme attractive to the legislatures of both Bihar and Bengal.

The inherent autonomy of the DVC, however, went down hard in both Bengal and Bihar. Most of this animosity was jealousy at seeing an independent power operating within state territory. Coupled with this was the awkwardness in each state government's having to ask and give concessions relating to the interests of a bordering state and the central government.

In a course of events strikingly similar to the diminution of the powers of TVA and the rise of those of the participating states in the United States, Bengal and Bihar began to provide many of the services originally set up as the responsibilities of the DVC, especially the generation and distribution of electric power. What had been an attractive proposal during
the turbulent times of independence turned into a source of annoyance and embarrassment to state leaders as conditions stabilized and each state acquired the effective powers to assert itself in relation to the center and its neighbor. Much of this assertiveness can be laid at the door of the West Bengal State Congress party.30

Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization (CMPO)

Despite its assertiveness in the case of the semiautonomous Damodar Valley Corporation, the State of West Bengal has, in effect, declared itself incapable of coping with the city of Calcutta. It turned to outside sources in the central government and international aid-giving agencies for the technical skills and financial support of a major regional planning effort.31

The allocations under the Third Five-Year Plan, the U.S. Food for Peace program, the Ford Foundation, and other organizations were substantial but the net results have been few. Certain critics feel, with some justification, that the government of West Bengal and the Calcutta Metropolitan Corporation are not taking the job of urban planning seriously enough to implement their principal recommendations.32

In many respects Calcutta is a national phenomenon whose problems extend well beyond those of West Bengal. The former prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, pointed out in 1961 that “Calcutta is the biggest city in the country. Its problems are national problems—quite apart from problems from West Bengal, and it is necessary that something special should be done.”33 The hinterland extends hundreds of miles to the west, into an industrial region that has been characterized as the Ruhr of India. Despite the far-reaching influence of the surrounding region on the city, and vice versa, there is nothing in the Basic Development Plan for the period 1966–1986 that recognizes the need for concomitant agricultural and rural development in the region.

EAST BENGAL AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Village Agricultural and Industrial Development (V-AID)

In the unsettled conditions of postpartition East Pakistan, rural development responsibilities were in the hands of the separately established departments of government. These included agencies dealing with agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, fisheries, cooperation, marketing, health, and so forth.34 Each had a hierarchical organization, uncoordinated with the hierarchies of any of the others. The problem was compounded by the paucity of technically trained personnel, who had opted for Pakistan following partition. Those personnel who were in the service of these
agencies almost to a man lacked effective knowledge and experience of meaningful rural development work.

Because of these difficulties, the government of Pakistan endeavored to build a rural development extension service that, in a single agency, would serve the needs of all the nation-building departments. As a model, the government reached back to the same precedents on which India's Community Development Program had been established. Building on those precedents and on the contemporary experience of India's Community Development Programs and the United States extension programs, Pakistan launched its own effort in June 1952—the Village Agricultural and Industrial Development program (V-AID).

In 1938 a Rural Reconstruction Department had been established in Bengal, following on pioneering rural development efforts elsewhere in undivided India during the 1920s and 1930s. However, the inappropriateness of having a development establishment separate from the nation-building departments was recognized by the Bengal Administration Enquiry Committee of 1944–1945. Upon the recommendations of this committee, known also as the Rowlands Committee, rural development responsibilities were to be assigned specifically to the technical and administrative branches of the civil service and integrated into local government activities. Despite the principles emphasized at the time of the disbanding of the Rural Reconstruction Department just prior to partition, much the same kind of organization was reestablished in V-AID—largely because of the combined inability and unwillingness of the existing administrative machinery to meet the training and technical service needs for village development during the early days of independence.

Multipurpose village workers were trained at one of three original (later expanded) training institutes in East Pakistan. They were then assigned to the bottom rung of the V-AID organization. At these levels V-AID utilized specially constituted, locally elected councils of elders to legitimize and institutionalize local development efforts. A hierarchy of advisory councils with units at each administrative echelon brought representatives of the technical departments into contact with the V-AID effort. The agency itself was organized into a separate hierarchy whose chief administrator was located at the Central Ministry of Economic Affairs. The chief administrator of V-AID in East Pakistan reported to the Provincial Commissioner of the Division of Planning.

To train the middle and higher ranks of V-AID personnel, an academy was established in East (as well as in West) Pakistan. This academy, located at Comilla, began operations in 1959, at a time when V-AID was on the threshold of dissolution.

Despite the application of a great deal of dedicated professional talent
whose emotions and technical skills became wedded to the cause of rural development based on community development principles such as "self-help," "felt needs," and "local coordination," V-AID shunned on the realities of the bureaucratic powers it sought to bypass. The technical departments were subordinated in the programs. The chief officers of the administrative districts of the civil government were involved only as members of advisory committees, and the formal rural local government bodies were not even in the picture. This de facto confrontation flared into the open as the Agriculture Department became overtly competitive and as other supporters of integrated rural development (including the Comilla Academy) set off in more promising, if only slightly less turbulent, directions.38

In short order, V-AID was banned from working within the jurisdiction of the Directorate of Agriculture. A year later it was abolished altogether. The organization was gone but the problems remained:

When V-AID failed in its attempt at coordination the province was left with serious problems: mutually exclusive departments trying to operate separate and sometimes conflicting programs in the mofussil; a civil administration unconnected with, and often unconcerned about, development programs; and a system of local self-government badly weakened.39

Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC)

Government decided on new endeavors to correct these problems. Despite its bureaucratic "victory" over V-AID, the Agriculture Department was still regarded as incapable of meeting the considerable needs for increasing agricultural production. The report of the Food and Agriculture Commission, released in November 1960, specifically stated that the department lacked the knowledge and facilities to do the job.40 Despite the ill-fortune that the government of Pakistan seemed to be having with attempts to bypass entrenched and ineffective units of government, it did not give up. The success it experienced with the creation in 1959 of the engineering-oriented Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA)41 led it to attempt the establishment of a semiautonomous Agricultural Development Corporation (ADC). The primary responsibility of ADC was to procure and distribute agricultural production inputs (such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and credit) and to extend knowledge through various information and training activities.

For many reasons the ADC was slow to organize. Not the least of the problems was the unwillingness of the Agriculture Department to yield to the recommendations of the Food and Agriculture Commission. Instead the department continued to expand its programs in the rural areas.
Basic Democracies and the Rural Works Program

After slightly more than a decade of independence in Pakistan, martial law was proclaimed by Mohammed Ayub Khan in a bloodless coup in October 1958. The effort was principally to restore order and direction to a nation whose political scene was approaching chaos and whose economic scene was stagnating. A year later Ayub Khan promulgated the broadly innovative "Basic Democracies Order," which reorganized local government. Not only was a new form of electoral college organized under this order, but the system potentially became an instrument for greater local involvement in national affairs and for bringing public services closer to the rural areas and the towns.

Within the districts of East Bengal three tiers of local government were established. At the lowest level were the Union Councils. At the next higher jurisdiction, covering an administrative area of approximately one hundred square miles and a population of 150,000 to 200,000, were the Thana Councils. At each of the then seventeen districts were the District Councils. The Union Council bore a close resemblance to the Union Board set up under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act of 1919. The members were elected within electoral wards from population clusters of about 10,000 persons (later raised to 12,500). The members of the Union Council elected their own chairman. Although the Union Council had a long list of optional functions and an income based on land revenue, it did not in fact progress much beyond the precedents of the Union Board in the decades prior to independence and fell short of meeting contemporary local government needs.

Much the same could be said of the District Council, whose membership was composed of officials and representatives elected from the body of Union Council chairmen in the district. The council's revenue base was largely a share of the land revenue, although additional taxes could be levied. With an extended list of optional functions the District Council was provided with a fairly full scope. However, in 1963 it was reported that the new District Councils were suffering under the same weaknesses—lack of planning, inefficient administration, and a shortage of funds—which had plagued the old District Boards.

The same could not be said of the Thana Council, especially after it became the object of intensive experimentation and development as a pilot project in the rural administration experiment of the Academy for Rural Development at Comilla. The Thana Council was an innovation without precedent at that hierarchical level. Originally established as the locus of a police station providing access to most rural areas within a walk of a few hours, the thana level of jurisdiction provided an opportunity to
deliver other public services at a point closer to the rural people and to do so in a coordinated manner.\textsuperscript{46} The district level had been the previous concentrated location of public services closest to the rural people. As increasing numbers of officers of the various nation-building departments were assigned to the thana level, they were organized into a thana office building constructed with funds under the Rural Works Program. At this location they could be more easily contacted by farmers and coordinated by thana-level supervisory administrators. The basic functions of the Thana Council were envisioned as planning and coordination.\textsuperscript{47}

Unlike the Union and District Councils, there were no separate revenue sources available to the Thana Council other than grants from higher levels. This was fitting because the council, per se, had no executive functions beyond those which its members could exercise in their regular roles as government officers or as chairmen of the Union Councils within the thana.

The chairman of the Thana Council was the subdivisonal officer (SDO), a young man near the beginning of his career in the higher civil service, the Civil Service of Pakistan (CSP). The SDO was at the same time chairman of all the Thana Councils within his subdivision and was thus available only intermittently. The day-to-day affairs of the Thana Council were in the hands of the circle officer, an appointed official in the provincial civil service, the East Pakistan Civil Service (EPCS). The appointed members of the Thana Council were thana-level government officers representing the administrative and technical cadres of the various government departments. The elected members were the chairmen of the Union Councils within the thana.

Several levels of administrative status and jurisdiction were represented at a fully attended Thana Council meeting, as were several levels of social station and background. This fact, coupled with the proximity to both rural people and government services, made it a natural object for experimentation. One challenge was to devise ways in which to make the Thana Council a cohesive functioning unit. Another was to fit the aptitudes of the council to development needs.

Government officers were not accustomed to coordinating with each other, much less with elected rural leaders. The early meetings of the pilot Thana Council in Comilla were marked by erratic attendance and confusion over roles and status.\textsuperscript{48} A need for training and for a functional raison d'être had to be filled. Intrinsically the members of the council were not rural development planners, and their entire experience was contrary to the norm of coordinated and cooperative rural involvement.

One role that did seem to come more easily to the local council than any other was the management of rural public works projects at low cost. This
discovery came at a time when the U.S. Food for Peace program had provided surplus food grain to Pakistan. The leader of the Harvard Development Advisory Service Team in Pakistan suggested that a rural works program be attempted in East Pakistan on a pilot basis in Comilla Thana.49 The pilot project adapted a rural planning device from Malaysia—the Red Book, which was a series of map worksheets and detailed instructions. The elected and appointed members of the Thana Council worked under the guidance of the circle officer, who had been through a special training course at the Academy for Rural Development. They prepared base maps of the existing drainage canal and road network and a series of annual plan maps that were designed to meet the priority needs for drainage canals, culverts, ridges, and village roads over a period of five or more years. Because similar plans were being concurrently laid for rural works adapted to the jurisdiction of the Union Council and the District Council, extended coordination of plans was undertaken between hierarchical levels. Technical engineering opinions were provided under a mandate to the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). The methods for identifying projects, for assigning them priorities, for collating Thana Council and Union Council projects, for securing technical opinions from such agencies as WAPDA, for training local project committees (chaired by Union Council members) to supervise local labor hired during the dry season, for using Food for Peace wheat in partial payment of wages (a practice displaced in later years by wage payments using proceeds from government sales of the wheat), for measuring physical accomplishments, for keeping records and accounts, and for establishing working relationships between government officers and council members—all were incorporated into a manual of procedures. This manual became the basis for the training program and operational guidance of the Rural Works Program as it was expanded from its pilot phase to all of East Pakistan and subsequently to the whole country. Not only did the Rural Works Program provide a rural infrastructure;50 it also gave local officials and elected leaders experience and confidence in managing public affairs in coordination with other units of local government and with the available technical public services.51

The Comilla Pilot Project in Rural Cooperatives

An alternative approach to rural cooperatives was experimented with on a significant scale in Comilla Thana by the Academy for Rural Development beginning in 1960.52 Although variously stated in various sources, the objectives of the project eventually worked out to be:

1. The organization of economically dispersed small holders, share-
croppers, and laborers who were vulnerable in their dealings with commercial traders, moneylenders, landlords, and employers.

2. The training of rural people in technical vocational skills, problem-solving, management procedure, hygiene, literacy, and related developmentally relevant knowledge, attitudes, and skills which were unavailable from traditional sources in village society.

3. The provision of supportive services especially for the promotion of productivity and income. These included organizational and production planning assistance, access to credit and other production inputs, to technical information, and to stable markets.

4. The constructive guidance through discipline, both in the form of positive inducements such as access to the services mentioned above, and to a certain extent in the form of negative sanctions. These controls conserve scarce resources and provide mutual protection against individual vagaries.\(^{53}\)

The project's intent was to give rural people the capacity to participate in shaping their own futures and to enter into collaborative relations with government and other institutions in effecting developments that were beyond the capacity of government alone.

The Comilla pilot project in rural cooperatives comprised a system of village-level cooperative societies integrated under a central cooperative association which acted as a servicing headquarters for all the cooperatives within the hundred or so square miles of the thana. The basic unit was the village-based cooperative, which was integrated into the cooperative system. Although each cooperative was formed voluntarily by a group of local farmers, they obligated themselves to follow a program of activities that took full advantage of the services provided through the central cooperative association.

A primary society had about forty members who selected their own leaders. The membership was expected to meet weekly under the coordination of the manager to discuss financial management, technical training in agriculture, and other matters. Each member was also expected to purchase at least one ten-rupee share in the central association each year and to make a small savings account deposit every week (the minimum amount was decided by each local society—usually a quarter of a rupee or more). Each week the manager of the cooperative society visited the central association's headquarters to deposit these funds and have them recorded. While there he attended training classes on seasonally important agricultural topics. Another member of the village cooperative, selected to be the "model farmer," attended regular training sessions held at conveniently located centers in the rural areas. These two officers of the
primary society acted as de facto agents in their home villages, leading training sessions at each weekly meeting and using their own landholdings as demonstrations.

Credit, power pump irrigation, tractor cultivation, the supply of improved varieties of seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides, and the processing and marketing of farm products were among the services provided by the central association. The members of the local cooperatives were expected to make the fullest possible use of these services. The amount which could be borrowed by members of a local cooperative depended on the total savings of the group together with the amount they held as shares in the central association, and qualified by an appraisal of the functional viability and vigor of the cooperative. The loans were allocated within the society by the managing committee according to a general production plan in which the purpose of each member's loan was stated. The financial arrangement for savings and loans constituted a rural banking system.

In time, nonagricultural cooperatives were organized in Comilla Thana among local craftsmen, cycle rickshaw operators, and others (many of whom were landless laborers). As the membership of these groups increased it became necessary for two intervening "federations" to be organized between the primary cooperatives and the central association: one for agricultural cooperatives and one for nonagricultural (special) cooperatives. Each federation maintained accountants and inspectors who acted as tutors and overseers of the progress of the societies, the accuracy of their records, and the progress of individual members. These inspectors kept a lookout for weaknesses and breakdowns in the system. Difficulties which the inspectors could not resolve on the spot during their field visits were referred to the appropriate federation for corrective action. The federations could, if necessary, exert pressure for compliance by withholding essential services or, as a last resort, they could sell collateral assets to recover defaulted loans—although this was rarely necessary.

The development of the cooperative project was tied in with the academy's pilot project in rural administration. The rural cooperative system was envisioned as an integral element in the Thana Training and Development Center. The support was mutual, since the cooperatives bolstered the government's rural development activities and the local officials served as trainers at the weekly classes for managers and others.

The expansion of the pilot project beyond the initial experimental area of Comilla Thana took place in several stages. In mid-1963, three thana projects were set up, one in each of three other divisions of the Province of East Pakistan. These were located adjacent to training institutes operated by the Department of Basic Democracies and Local Government. Key staff members underwent a six months' course of train-
ing at Comilla. These principal staff members, once they were posted, continued to coordinate through a specially designated supervisory officer located at Comilla and through attendance at monthly coordination conferences. Following a pattern similar to the three earlier expansion thanas, the Comilla model was readapted in 1965 in seven other thanas of Comilla district. Because the Comilla project was a pilot operation, the expansion projects were administered by the Directorate of Agriculture and later by the Agricultural Development Corporation. Collaborative arrangements existed between these agencies and the Comilla Academy, especially with respect to training and coordination.

Although numerous difficulties were encountered in attempting to implement these expansions of the original model, there was considerable progress. As of June 1968, there were 339 primary cooperative societies in Comilla Thana, of which 78 were nonagricultural. As of June 1967, less than two percent of the loans made between 1961 and 1967 were overdue. In mid-1968 there were 673 primary agricultural societies in the three expansion thanas launched in mid-1963, with a loan repayment rate of ninety-two percent. In the seven thanas elsewhere in Comilla district into which the Comilla-type cooperative model had been expanded in 1966, a total of 948 primary societies had been established and a loan repayment rate of eighty-two percent was reported.

Thana Irrigation Plan (TIP)

At this time expansion was methodically continuing into the remaining thirteen thanas of Comilla district, as well as into other areas on a modified basis. However, questions were also being raised regarding the pace of rural transformation. The Comilla-type cooperative system was a relatively sophisticated complex requiring considerable time to establish and institutionalize a viable network of agricultural and nonagricultural societies linked to a central servicing headquarters and to the agencies of the civil administration.

As an alternative to pursuing the strategy of first building up fairly sophisticated system of cooperative societies to spread agricultural modernization and technological change, a reverse procedure was suggested. It was proposed to utilize the method of planning through the Thana Councils that had been successfully worked out under the Rural Works Program as a device for planning the installation for power pump facilities and irrigation channels on a broad scale. Irrigation was seen as the chief technological requirement for rapid agricultural change under monsoon conditions which included a long dry season. Pump and motor sets were to be integrated with special local farmer organizations that could be set up as irrigation groups. Their relatively simple structure made the irrigation groups more amenable to rapid expansion. This program was
accepted by government and formalized as the Expanded Works Program —Thana Irrigation Plan (TIP), with a target of installing forty thousand pumps in the province over a five-year period.

In addition to the complex of supporting institutions provided locally through the planning and coordination of the Thana Council, administrative support at the highest level was secured through a provincial coordinating committee that included the chief administrators of the Department of Local Government, the Agricultural Directorate, the Water and Power Development Authority, and the Agricultural Development Corporation. Agricultural credit was introduced into the irrigation program with the support of the Agricultural Development Bank, the Provincial Cooperative Bank, and the medium of Tacavi loans under the revenue administration. The sequence of activities was leading ultimately to the integration of other services into the program.

The growing perception of the comprehensive nature of rural development needs, and the existence of encouraging demonstrations of other integrated programs, led in 1969 to the placement of a formal proposal before the Pakistan Planning Commission to establish multifaceted rural development cooperative projects in all the thanas of East Bengal along lines adapted from the Comilla experiment.

It was at approximately this time that natural calamity and civil unrest swept the province. However, it did not fail the notice of the administrators of martial law that the areas where the projects were established had gone through the period with greater stability, on the whole, than had most other areas. Progress was suspended because of the worsening political situation. War broke out in March 1971, making constructive action impossible.

**Reflections on Rural Public Policy**

Rural development policy in Bengal must cope with some concerns that are unique to the region and with others that are broadly shared with other densely populated agrarian areas. The density of population, the low levels of education, the incidence of disease, the vulnerability to a dramatic climate, and the shallow governmental capacity in the nation-building public services are problems experienced in many other parts of the world. But the specific ways in which these problems appear in Bengal are, of course, unique. Also unique is the mystique of being a “Bengali,” a member of a large linguistic, cultural, and historical entity that is perceived internally and externally as distinct from other areas. Despite these complicating factors, and many others, public policy for rural development will have to deal with at least six basic issues.

First, the rural scene is a “system” of broad relationships that, at least in concept, need to be perceived as integrated. Such a perspective indicates
the need to gather information, select goals, mobilize resources and interests around these goals, and plan a foundation of nationhood that can be shared. This approach highlights a need for integrated local and central planning. The administrative services of government must also be integrated with private, commercial, and social interests. Dynamic stability and leadership at the highest levels are essential.

Second, investments in flood control, irrigation, transportation, electric power, public buildings, and other facilities will need to be made with foresight and determination well beyond the demand for short-term economic benefits.

Third, investments in agricultural research and extension (including crop and animal husbandry, rural credit and banking, special education, and the like) will have to be made so as to take advantage of international developments and to involve the relevant elements in the rural areas.

Fourth, rural governing institutions will have to be developed according to the goals that have been selected. Rural planning and public facilities bodies will be necessary to manage local irrigation, marketing, banking, credit, education, and public works in collaboration with institutions at higher levels.

Fifth, revenue and other fiscal institutions—including competent assessment and collection agencies as well as policy- and law-making institutions—will have to be developed to build a system of resource mobilization and allocation. Poverty and low productivity mask the rich resource base of Bengal, which could be developed.

Sixth, a flexible approach needs to be fostered in the reformation or design of rural policies and institutions. The pilot projects at Comilla and elsewhere offer hard evidence to government that standing practice can be modified.

The tasks faced by any government are immense, and the governments in Bengal have been deeply involved in these tasks with the help of, and in spite of, their domestic and international well-wishers and critics. Although inevitably flavored with utopian sentiment, the cases I have discussed offer lessons that should not go unnoticed.

NOTES

4. Rashid, op. cit., p. 207; West Bengal State Statistical Bureau, op. cit., part 1, table 10.1, p. 28.
11. Ibid., p. 10.
17. Ibid., p. 36.
18. Frankel, op. cit., pp. 188–189.
21. Ibid., p. 163.
22. Ibid., pp. 163–169.
26. Ibid., p. 20.
27. Frankel, op. cit., p. 158.
29. Ibid., pp. 89–95.
30. Ibid., p. 127.
33. As quoted in Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, op. cit., preface.

35. The noted work of F. L. Brayne in Gurgaon district (Punjab) while he was deputy commissioner, of Spencer Hatch in South Travancore, of Rabindranath Tagore at Shriniketan, and of Malcom Darling, although impermanent, was influential on much of the work taken up by governments at a later date. Tepper, op. cit., p. 104.


38. Tepper, op. cit., p. 105.


42. Tepper, op. cit., p. 106.


46. Akhter Hameed Khan, “Note Prepared for Mr. Azfar, Chief Secretary, Government of East Pakistan, May 1959,” as reproduced in Moshen, op. cit., appendix C-1, pp. 88–89.

47. Moshen, op. cit., pp. 18–24.


50. Tepper, op. cit., p. 119.

51. The progress of this experiment has been widely reported on. Primary sources are in the annual reports of the cooperative project published by the Academy for Rural Development beginning in 1961; additional data are collected in Arthur F. Raper and others, *Rural Development in Action: The Comprehensive Experiment at Comilla, East Pakistan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).


55. Ibid., pp. 238–239.

56. Ibid., table D, p. 308.

57. Ibid., p. 74.

58. Ibid., p. 236.

59. Ibid., p. 241.
A Bibliographic Essay on Bengal Studies in The United States

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In May 1972, at the Eighth Annual Bengal Studies Conference in Toronto, some fifty scholars participated in seven panels dealing with a variety of topics ranging from Brahmo contact with Unitarianism in the nineteenth century to current priorities in Bangladesh. As with every other conference since the earliest one at Michigan State in 1965, ideas were hotly discussed, and even mediocre papers with vaguely formed issues evoked sharp controversy, while clarity and academic detachment remained the two scholarly virtues conspicuously absent during the proceedings. And, as always, each American participant succumbed to that indefinable, indefensible, and indefatigable spirit or mystique of Bengal which in the face of chronic disaster—from the partition of 1905 to the bloody birth of Bangladesh—has produced a rapturous ambivalence between love and hate, optimism and pessimism, loyalty and alienation.

To understand the progress of Bengal studies in the United States during the last decade, one must somehow account for that zealous and irrational appreciation of Bengal by American academics who are generally conservative in bestowing affection, rational by profession, and relatively dull in choice of lifestyle. The Bengal known to American scholars who have lived and researched there over the last decade is without doubt the most politically unstable and the most violent state in South Asia, the most troubled socially, and the least progressive economically. The great Bengali urban metropolis of Calcutta (where most of the Americans under consideration have lived for a year or more) has the distinction among Indian cities of having been treated by the world press in a consistently derogatory manner as the "city of dreadful night." 1 Calcutta's image and prospects were perhaps best summed up by a sympathetic New York Times
correspondent a few years ago in an article entitled "Can India Survive Calcutta?".2

Nevertheless, with few exceptions, most of the graduate students who were trained as Bengal specialists between 1958 and 1964 have persisted in their chosen field. Edward Dimock, who inspired the majority of them in a seminar on the cultural and literary history of Bengal at Chicago, has attributed the enthusiasm for Bengali culture to the attraction of the language, to Bengal’s "long and lush . . . literary tradition," to Bengal’s "tremendous fund of source material," and to Bengal’s rich and diversified history.3 Moreover, Dimock contended that American scholars with area studies background and with competence in a modern South Asian language had become impatient with "simplistic thinking" about the "macrocosm" of India and were instead probing deeply into the "microcosm" of regional cultures.4 In Dimock’s words, "we must begin to examine in necessarily minute detail the single strands which make up the complex fabric of India."5 Each region of the subcontinent has unique aspects which are in "themselves fascinating and highly individual, and as such worthy of study and understanding."6 Parochialism, however, is not the objective of the American student of Bengal: "it is through the unit that we are attempting to approach the totality."7

Part of the emotional commitment to Bengal, therefore, is to be explained as a consequence of an area studies training and an emphasis on regional languages and cultures. Bengal happened to be selected as the first experiment to justify the hypothesis and one can only imagine the excitement of the pioneers whose articles and monographs opened a virtual new world. In an editorial preface to the second volume of the Bengal studies proceedings, I noted that:

In May, 1966, the University of Missouri played host to the second annual conference on Bengal Studies which had convened to discuss "Bengal Regionalism: Origins and Conceptual Problems." There was much confusion and uncertainty about the validity of intensive regional studies in those days and we were often criticized by well-meaning scholars who were doing precisely the same thing for Punjab, Maharashtra, and the Dravidian South. Though most of us were quick to defend the regional approach, we were conceptually unsure of ourselves. Evidently we were not alone that year in trying to avoid a crisis of scholarly identity between India and Bengal, Maharashtra, or the Punjab. A month earlier, Robert I. Crane had assembled South Asian notables of every region and discipline at Duke University to inquire into "Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies."8

**Academic Profile of the Bengal Specialist**

This essay deals with a selection of the published work of fourteen scholars—thirteen Americans and one acculturated New Zealander—who in
the estimation of their peers have made solid contributions to Bengal studies. Who are these persons? Where were they educated and what was their intellectual orientation to South Asia? What are their disciplines and their general characteristics as scholars of Bengal studies? Interestingly, the two senior scholars who published earliest on Bengal, Edward Dimock and Stephen Hay, were Harvard Ph.D.'s. Dimock worked in the Department of Sanskrit and Indic Studies, whereas Hay was a product of the Department of History with a specialized interest in East Asia.

In the late 1950s both these men joined the University of Chicago during the period of formative growth of the university's South Asia Center. At the initiative of Myron Weiner, a political scientist specializing on India, the Bengali language was first offered at the university. The early interest in Bengal by Dimock, Hay, and Weiner explains why Chicago produced so many graduate students committed to that region of South Asia. And of those students, the majority were in history, a discipline which traditionally favored intensive area concentration. Thus among Hay's students up to 1964 were included Philip Calkins, Leonard Gordon (on leave from Harvard), Warren Gunderson, Ronald Inden, Barrie Morrison, and myself. Weiner's student of Bengal was Marcus Franda while Ralph Nicholas from anthropology was the first graduate from that department with the same regional specialization.

At the University of Pennsylvania under Norman Brown's direction, South Asia Regional Studies was established as a department offering degrees to doctoral candidates with a concentration in one of several disciplines. Rachel Van M. Baumer received her doctoral degree from this program after having studied Bengali literature with the late T. W. Clark. Blair Kling developed his interest in modern Bengali history there while studying with Holden Furber, dean of South Asian historians in America. John McLane and John Broomfield, the former an American and the latter a New Zealander, are both historians who were area-trained abroad. McLane is a graduate of British universities whereas Broomfield studied at Australian National University.

Among the pioneers of Bengal studies over the last decade, historians predominate. Of the fourteen, ten are trained historians while two others are strongly influenced by history in their work. This stress has made most of the Bengal scholars conscious of the temporal dimension, of processes and stages of growth and decline, of the need to view Bengali society and culture dynamically rather than statically. Most conferences and seminars on Bengal have been organized chronologically around major historical periods, and one of the leading questions that invariably emerges at such gatherings deals with the problem of change and continuity in Bengali culture.
On the other hand, a great emphasis on the little tradition of Bengal as against the great tradition of India, the relativistic bias of some anthropologists at Chicago, and the inevitable consequences of regional identity have modified the characteristic historicity of the group by stressing the inner structure of the culture more than the irruptive external forces and movements impinging on it. Those Bengal scholars who have sought a key to the unique culture of the region have tended to treat historical changes as irrelevant happenings which hardly touch the hard core of the closed system.

Nonetheless, the Bengal specialist has not gone to ideological extremes in his work. Other influences and considerations have operated in the field. If, for example, historians predominate among Bengal specialists, it is the modernists who predominate among historians. This tendency may be explained as a result of a happy coalescence of interests between advocates of regionalism in South Asia and representatives of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare anxious to extend fellowships to students achieving linguistic competence in the crucial languages of Asia. The National Defense Education Act center idea favored Bengali or Marathi or Hindi because they were the living languages of the Indian people. It is probably safe to generalize that agencies willing and able to send Americans to India or Pakistan favored proposals on problems that were of contemporary interest or at least modern in the sense of tracing the origins of present-day concerns. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that though only Nicholas and Franda among the fourteen are social scientists per se, the majority of historians are greatly influenced by social science methods and techniques.

Thus it can be said that the Bengal specialist is subject to a number of influences: historical perspective, cultural relativism, social science, and present-day concerns. Nor is it possible to establish for him any neat category between the social sciences and humanities. As area specialist exposed to both approaches and as historians who by the nature of their craft must belong to both camps, Bengal scholars have thus far proved a mixed bag indeed.

**AN ANALYSIS OF BENGAL SCHOLARSHIP IN AMERICA**

Probably the first work of consequence by an American scholar of Bengal appeared in 1963 with the publication of Edward Dimock’s translation of Bengali tales from court and village in a volume entitled *The Thief of Love*. Dimock had three purposes in bringing out the volume: to justify the regional approach to South Asia by showing “that there is a good deal of enjoyment as well as enlightenment to be had from study of the regional literatures of South Asia”⁹; to illuminate the medieval period of
India, "that period from the thirteenth through the eighteenth centuries";10 and to meet a need clearly felt at the University of Chicago: "there are precious few translations from the literature of the mediæval period of any South Asian language."11

Dimock's volume, as he described it, was a pioneer effort to open up a new world or perhaps rediscover it. "When we considered India at all," he wrote, "most people of my generation, growing up in the thirties and forties, thought of it in terms of the British Empire."12 It was not the real India that people conjured up in their minds but a series of images generated by popular literature and the cinema. Said Dimock, "India was a British land, and her culture, represented to us in movie versions of Kipling stories, was that of Britain, re-enacted in a tropical and foreign land."13 The second set of images Dimock sought to counter was that of the nineteenth-century Orientalist scholar who conceived India largely in terms of the Sanskritic-oriented culture or great tradition of the Indian macrocosm. It was Dimock's conviction that by moving away from the British and Orientalist perceptions of India and by moving into the popular cultures and popular languages of the regions, a new and richer dimension of understanding about India could be achieved.

Dimock's partiality for medieval Bengali language and literature and his emphasis on the interaction of the classical great tradition (Aryan) with the regional traditions (Dravidian) had important implications which later Bengal scholars did not always accept. Dimock argued in his introduction that Bengali stood to Sanskrit rather much as Italian did to Latin. Surely if the objective of the scholar were to explore Italian history and culture, he would prefer to work with Italian sources rather than Latin. But then Dimock's analogy took a certain twist when he referred to a Bengali literary tradition that has been "unbroken from the ninth or tenth century Buddhist esoteric texts called caryā-padas, to the present."14 The first difficulty was Dimock's overly close identification between the regional language of Bengal spoken today and its linguistic and literary phase of development during the middle ages. The second difficulty was that he did not carry the analogy between Bengali and European languages far enough in the historical perspective of change and continuity. Is the language of the Italian people today the language of the pre-Renaissance period? Do the English people today speak in the idiom of Chaucer? As for Bengal, is the literature of the Bengali people today really the same as the literature of the pre-Muslim period? Is the Bengali of Caṇḍidāsa the same Bengali of Rabindranath Tagore? Dimock's stress on origins and the unbroken continuity of a tradition thus turned the quest inward in the direction of a closed inner core of the Bengali culture which, it was believed, remained
pure and immune from revolution, invasion, and conquest—and from the processes of modernization which had been transforming Western literary traditions for centuries since the Renaissance.

Not surprising, therefore, is the fact that Dimock chose as his last translation chronologically in *The Thief of Love* Bharatchandra's *Vidyā-Sundara*, composed sometime before 1760. The British began to dominate Bengal about then: the victory at Plassey was in 1756; the selection of Calcutta as capital was in 1772; the development of a new Bengali prose style was dated from 1800 with the establishment of the College of Fort William; and the reform work of Rammohun Roy, "father of modern India," has generally been set at about 1815. From then on, a radically new Bengali language and literature emerged through textbook translations, journalism, novels, short stories, poetry, and drama. The writers were among the newly risen Western-educated intelligentsia whose creative outburst and ideological pursuits on behalf of modernism and a new cultural identity have come to be known as the Bengal renaissance.

In 1965, sandwiched between articles in *Changing Japanese Attitudes Toward Modernization*, there appeared a lone piece on Indian modernization by Stephen Hay: "Western and Indigenous Elements in Modern Indian Thought: The Case of Rammohun Roy." With Hay, among Americans interested in Bengal, Dimock’s quest backward in time to understand continuity was shifted to the future to understand change. And instead of Dimock’s preoccupation with the sources of the inner culture, Hay addressed himself to the study of Bengal in interaction with the Western world. "All through the non-Western world in recent centuries," wrote Hay, "the pace of change has been vastly accelerated by contact and conflict with the expanding society and culture of the modern West."15 Hay too conceived of himself as a pioneer, not merely of discovering new facts about Bengal but of contributing new ideas to the evolving conceptual scheme on the problem of Asian modernity in the context of cultural encounter and accommodation with the West. He said: "Our problem, then, is to create and refine a conceptual framework for the study of change in non-Western civilizations, within which indigenous and Western, traditional and modern elements can be analyzed and meaningfully related to each other."16

Hay’s choice of Bengal as his region of inquiry apparently did not stem from any strong commitment to the language and culture. "Nowhere in India were Western influences stronger, and Indian responses more vigorous, than in the region where the British planted their capital: Bengal."17 This was Hay’s justification for selection of venue. It was Hay, while depicting the new class of upper-caste "Hindu gentry" responding favorably
to the "cultural traditions of their new rulers," who first coined the term bhadrālok\textsuperscript{18} as a conceptual device for comprehending the Bengali elite under British colonialism and imperialism.

Rammohun Roy, born in 1772, twelve years after Bhāratachandra’s death, was chosen by Hay because he was the "first Indian intellectual seriously to study the civilization of the West."\textsuperscript{19} Moreover, Rammohun expressed in his writings "the fundamental ideas on the nature and relationship of Indian and Western society and culture whose implications have been worked out by a succession of later thinkers and reformers, and are still being worked out today."\textsuperscript{20} Therefore, by studying Rammohun one could learn something significant not merely about Bengal but also about "the nature and relationship of indigenous and Western, traditional and modern elements in nineteenth and twentieth century Indian thought."\textsuperscript{21}

The importance of this article by Hay and of his general approach to the history of Bengal is that it cleared away many of the Eurocentric attitudes about modernity in South Asia and opened new vistas for dealing with the general problem in a more objective, scientific, and sophisticated manner. In point of fact, Hay never offered anything new about Rammohun or about the Bengal of Rammohun’s time. In the article, available information on Rammohun was used to advance an idea and to promote interest in a valuable line of questions. Through Rammohun, for example, Hay finally worked out a definition of modernization: "a continuing process of improvement directed toward the achievement of this-worldly enlightenment and well-being through the sustained and systematic application of reason."\textsuperscript{22} Hay’s conclusion that Rammohun was a modernizer of his own tradition rather than a westernizer was no less important in implication than his conclusion that the impact of British intrusion in Bengal did in fact constitute a watershed between tradition and modernity in South Asia:

Westerners . . . brought to South Asia traditions of modernization which have transformed the views of Hindu and Muslim intellectuals toward their own traditions, making it impossible for them to return to their pre-modern, or traditionalist, orthodoxies. It is only a question of time until creative individuals come forward to continue the work pioneered by Rammohun Roy of selecting, reinterpreting, and integrating traditions from many civilizations, within the framework neither of traditionalism, nor of revivalism, but of continuing cultural modernization.\textsuperscript{29}

In 1966 two rather different books on Bengal were published: Edward Dimock’s *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, and *The Blue Mutiny* by Blair Kling. Both had been doctoral dissertations, Dimock’s dealing with erotic
mysticism in the Vaiśṇava-Sahajiyā cult of Bengal and Kling's dealing with the Indigo Disturbances in Bengal between 1859 and 1862. In terms of the problem of continuity and change in Bengal, Dimock was clearly reinforcing his earlier work by steeping himself in the literary and religious tradition of Vaiśṇavism as expressed in the sixteenth century during the era of Caitanya and his disciples. Kling, on the other hand, dealt directly and effectively with changing agrarian patterns as a result of British intrusion and responses to it by Bengali cultivators, zemindars, and the urbanized intelligentsia of Calcutta.

Dimock's sources for The Place of the Hidden Moon were mostly Bengali and Sanskrit texts which he employed laboriously and expertly as building blocks in constructing as it were the architecture of Bengali culture. To be sure, Dimock established a comparative bridge between leading themes of Bengali Vaiśṇavism and similar themes in the European medieval tradition—as, for example, the existence among Christian and Hindu poets of an apparent paradox between the spiritual "sacred" and the carnal "profane." The attempt to reconcile love of spirit and love of flesh as two warring intellectual or religious principles was, in Dimock's opinion, not a cultural peculiarity but "a human peculiarity" (neither East nor West). This applied to the "two essential phases or characteristics of love, union and separation," which were human and not cultural. Wrote Dimock:

In Bernard's image, the soul "desires" to be united with the Christ, and this statement emphasizes that the two are separate. It is this aspect of the image which is most usual to Christian, and I might add to orthodox Vaiśṇava, poets, although the pain of separation always suggests the joy of union. For love in separation is pure love, spiritual love.

These comparative assessments, especially the subsequent subtleties about love and marriage in the two great traditions of religious poetry, are extremely sensitive and useful both in comparative mysticism and in comparative medieval religious systems. But Dimock's purpose in all this, it seems to me, was not to break down discrete systems as a universalist but to win recognition and equality for a Bengali tradition by showing its functional equivalent in the hallowed heritage of the Western tradition. Thus Dimock argued effectively that the Vaiśṇava-Sahajiyā combination of sacred and profane love is neither uniquely the manifestation of a non-Christian heathen faith nor to be "passed off as the product of a primitive mentality."

Dimock's monograph represented one of the most sensitive and inspired attempts to resurrect a medieval tradition of India done in the twentieth century. It was also a masterful attempt to rectify a false image of both Sahajiyās and Vaiśṇavas allegedly using religion as a pretext for orgies of
self-gratification. Dimock, for instance, made an early and careful distinction between kāma and prema (carnal and spiritual love, respectively) as applied to the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme in Bengali poetry:

True love is prema, the love that Rādhā and the Gopis had for Kṛṣṇa, the love that the true worshipper emulates, which, when he has realized himself as Kṛṣṇa and his partner as Rādhā, he could not help emulating. In his attitude and in his worship there can be no trace of kāma, of carnal desire, of desire for the satisfaction of the self; kāma, unless it is transformed into true love, prema, leads not to joy, but to misery and hell.29

The world Blair Kling created in absorbing narrative style in The Blue Mutiny was totally different from Dimock’s medieval age centering about the great reformer Caitanya. Reading Kling’s book dispels doubts that British intrusion materially changed Bengali life and society. Kling’s was the first monograph by an American that dealt in large part with the rural history of Bengal under the British. In it he traced the rise of the indigo plantation system from 1802 through its golden age as a profit-making business (1834–1847) to its decline and collapse in the 1850s and 1860s. One segment of the book contains the story of nonofficial European planters, a story that is often ignored in the history of the colonial experience. The fact that by 1860 these planters had bought two-thirds of the land in Nadia district suggests how powerful they had become. The Blue Mutiny also tells the story of the zemindars, or native landowners, who competed with the Europeans. Above all it tells the story of the cultivators of indigo, their trials and tribulations, their leaders during the rebellion. Finally it tells the story of sympathetic Europeans and the Calcutta intelligentsia who joined forces against violence, coercion, and exploitation in the plantations.

Kling argued that the Indigo Rebellion was an important event in Bengali history for at least three reasons: first, the Government of India Act XI (1859) led to a full investigation of plantation abuses and provided legal options for the oppressed peasant and enabled the cultivator to “grasp the concept of lawful rights” with the result that they became “enthusiastic supporters of the legal process”; second, it provided the Calcutta intelligentsia with the experience of “applied techniques of political agitation” which they would later use in the nationalist struggle; and third, it helped give “rise among the intelligentsia to an idealization of the rustics.”31 Besides opening a field in Bengal studies on resistance movements, Kling’s important contribution was in his objective treatment of the facts—which made some Indian zemindars look as evil as did Europeans when portrayed by nationalists, and made European officials and magistrates appear much less imperious and unconcerned than when depicted by their own countrymen during the Victorian era. Kling’s strict
adherence to facts raises the question: Would Indians have done any differently in the position of the planters?

In 1967, the Asian Studies Center of Michigan State University published the first set of papers of the Bengal Studies Group which had met two years earlier in East Lansing. The subject of the conference was "Bengal: Literature and History." Following the direction Bengal studies were taking in America, the papers were divided by Dimock, the editor, into the medieval period and the period of the nineteenth century and after. The writers had been asked to use literary sources for the study of Bengal's cultural history.

The medieval papers included Dimock's study "The Ideal Man in Society in Vaiṣṇava and Vaiṣṇava-Sahajiyā Literature," a translation of "Two Autobiographical Accounts from Middle Bengali Literature" by Wayne Kilpatrick, and a study of "The Hindu Chiefdom in Middle Bengali Literature" by Ronald Inden. Inden's piece is of special interest because this was his earliest product as a student of social history and as a follower of Dimock seeking the true Bengal in the middle ages. From Bengali sources entirely, Inden masterfully reconstructed the "inner" political history of Bengal in the seventeenth century. The term inner is used advisedly here because Inden went beyond the usual level of Mogul imperial or regional Muslim dynastic history to the level of actual control by a number of independent and semi-independent rajas or zemindars.

According to Inden, though the Moguls conquered Bengal, problems of communication and transport compelled them to delegate actual power to the local chiefs. But to Inden, concerned less with such "passive external factors" and more with the culture pattern and Bengali value system, the real question was this: What were the "more 'active' internal factors relating to political organization and activity within the chiefdom itself that from the point of view of the inhabitants living inside the chiefdom made it a permanent political institution?"\(^{32}\) Inden answered his question by setting the organization and functions of the chief's political system (rājya) against a close study of the structural components which made up the chiefdom. Thus there was the political system itself, the territory or deśa, and the hierarchy of social groups or samāja. All these components were pulled together in a complex economic network based largely on agriculture—paddy cultivation—as the main source of wealth. The social system comprised the caste groups who according to Inden were dominated by the same three upper-caste groups of contemporary Bengal: "the Brāhmaṇ-priests, pandits, and preservers of Hindu tradition; the Baidyas-physicians; and the Kāyasthas-officials and landholders."\(^{33}\) Inden, then, from a medieval text, listed the lower specialist castes.

Inden's leading conclusion, perhaps, was that the whole system was held
together by sets of patron-client relationships at the apex of which stood the raja himself as the "most powerful leader and patron in the chief-
dom."34 Wrote Inden, "he provided them with protection and a number of other services, while they paid the revenue and provided local support."35 Moreover, these relationships were arranged in hierarchies as with "vil-
lagers, headmen, and chiefs" and "officials and armed retainers."36 It was through the patron-client relationship that the raja and his government "performed their political, economic, and religious functions within the local society."37 Consequently, the main thrust of Inden's argument was this: "The local Hindu chieftdom was not, therefore, just a creation of external factors; its political organization played an important role in shaping and maintaining local Hindu society. For both of these reasons, the local Hindu chieftdom was a permanent feature of the social structure of Bengal."38

The papers for the modern period, with one exception perhaps, differed from the medievalist approach by giving equal stress to the external factor of British intrusion and the internal factor of Bengali response. As one of Stephen Hay's two students contributing to the volume, I wrote "The Dimensions of Literature as an Analytical Tool for the Study of Bengal, 1800–1830." Taking the generation of intelligentsia of whom Rammohun Roy was the most conspicuous member, I examined their literary productions from differing perspectives in order to reconstruct the main historical outline of the period in which they lived. In the process, I had discovered, like Kling, that it was impossible to discuss Bengal under the British without focusing as much on the Englishmen who interacted closely with the Bengalis as on the Bengalis themselves. Thus, contrary to Inden who saw no point in discussing Moguls in Bengal, I actually emphasized the role of a group of English Orientalists who, by acting as windows to the West for Bengalis, influenced aspects of the internal culture.

In the article, I examined the cultural dimension first and found that much of the Orientalist literature reflected cultural attitudes toward Bengalis which underwent a definite change from negative to positive as a result of a sympathetic cultural orientation and training program which young civil servants received at the College of Fort William (established 1800). Bengalis in turn responded well to Englishmen who took an interest in their own culture. In the historical dimension Orientalist literature, because of its "bias for classicism in which the essence of Hindu civilization was believed to be contained in a golden age,"39 profoundly influ-
enced Hindu nationalism by reinforcing pride in a people about the virtues and wonder that was their pre-Muslim past. Examples of the earliest modern historical writings by Bengalis are interesting today for the ex-
pressions of a worldview delicately balanced between tradition and mo-
dernity. In the socioeconomic dimension, it was the grouping of intelligentsia that I addressed myself to in an effort to generalize about caste and class considerations of these writers of the new Bengali prose literature. I found that most of them were of the same three upper castes present in Inden's medieval chiefdom, though now modified in thought and behavior by Western education and a career in the professions. As for the final or existential dimension, I focused on the psychological aspects of the intelligentsia's groping for a new identity in the modern world:

The Bengali intellectual of the early 1800s found himself insecure psychologically not only because he was in the center of a spatial encounter between two cultures, but also because he found himself centered lengthwise in a newly discovered historical dimension. The Orientalists infused him with their image of an Indian golden age while the Serampore missionaries transmitted a Protestant's view of the medieval dark ages. Both left the Bengali with a faith in the perfectibility of all mankind. On the one hand, the intelligentsia viewed itself as representative of an exhausted culture and on the other, as representative of a culture organically disrupted by historical circumstances but capable of revitalization. It is not surprising, then, that Bengalis themselves should interpret their nineteenth-century heritage as a renaissance.  

Warren Gunderson, Stephen Hay's other student, dealt with the subsequent generation of intelligentsia in a paper entitled "Modernization and Cultural Change: The Self-Image and World View of the Bengal Intelligentsia as Found in the Writings of the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1830–1870." Like Hay, Gunderson saw modernization as a significant process in nineteenth-century Bengal; and like Hay in his article on Rammohun, he rejected the typological theories of modernity which all too neatly dichotomize traditional from modern societies. Gunderson's own position was that the intelligentsia is important to study because "in non-Western societies undergoing modernization, the western-educated individual plays a crucial role"; "that Bengali intellectuals responded to the challenge of a new cultural situation in ways which were rational and realistic"; and that "they developed an outlook which favored cultural change and modernization and which gave legitimacy and respectability to their own positions."

Gunderson's attempt to depict the character of the age at mid-century is one of the best examples yet of intellectual history among American scholars of Bengal. He used the literature of the intelligentsia to unify their innermost feelings and thoughts as the expression of an era. He found that as a result of momentous economic, social, and technological change in Bengal under the British, "progress, advancement, improvement: these became the watchword of the age."

The advanced guard of
the age of progress was the middle-class intellectuals whom Gunderson defined as "an umbrella under which the urban-dwelling, educated Bengali, regardless of income, status, or aspirations, could find shelter."45

Gunderson’s main conclusions about modernization among the Bengali middle class followed Hay’s own and represented a growing realization among Americans that modernization was not necessarily synonymous with westernization. This notion is apparent in Gunderson’s statement that “Bengali intellectuals showed an ability to borrow selectively and to incorporate new forms and ideas, without ceasing to be Bengalis.”46 Thus, along with Hay and others, Gunderson was prepared to argue that an attachment to cultural forms by Bengalis wishing to maintain their own identity did not necessarily label them as exponents of “orthodoxy or traditionalism.”

The third paper on modern Bengal was by T. W. Clark’s student, Rachel Van M. Baumer, who had written her dissertation on the many facets of Bankimchandra Chatterji’s thought and had chosen for her topic in this volume “Communal Attitudes in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.” Instead of the focus on acculturation as a result of British-Bengali interaction, she directed her attention to Hindu-Muslim relations as reflected in the writings of Bengali Hindus. This paper had particular merit because of the excellence of the translations and the lucid, well-structured narrative style.

Baumer’s method was to trace Hindu attitudes to Muslims in three separate works by three separate authors writing at three different times during the modern period. In my opinion, this method enabled her to write the most effective paper of any in terms of carrying out the objectives of the volume: to fuse literature and history by using literature historically. She looked at Ram Ram Basu’s Râjâ Pratâpâdityacaritra, written for the College of Fort William in 1801; she examined Śitârâm, a later novel by Bankimchandra published in 1887; and she analyzed Saratcandra Chatterji’s Maheś, which appeared in 1921. Baumer discovered that in the early 1800s Basu, when writing this history of a Bengali raja in sixteenth-century Jessore district, was completely oblivious to “Hindu-Muslim tension.”47 In fact, “the word Muslim rarely occurs in the text.”48 But in Bankimchandra, Hindu nationalism had evolved a hostile attitude not yet so much against the British overlord as against Muslims. According to Baumer, cultural differences between Hindus and Muslims were to Bankim “fundamental and irreconcilable.”49 In Saratcandra there seems to have been a reaction against Bankim’s kind of communal attitude and an appeal “to [Saratcandra’s] own community for a return to reason for peace and harmony in everyday life with men of the other community.”50

Baumer’s article was extremely revealing and pertinent in the light of
recent events which brought about the bloody birth of Bangladesh. But in the context of Bengal studies in America, her article represented the first effort to work with modern Bengali literature in contrast to Dimock's work with the medieval. The result was to open up a new world of Bengali fiction which could be studied aesthetically or as sources for social and cultural history.

The year 1868 proved to be a harvest year for Bengal studies—at least among the modernists who were beginning to show the fruits of their labor in history, anthropology, and political science. This was the year John Broomfield published his prize-winning *Elite Conflict in a Plural Society*; Leonard Gordon brought out his “Portrait of a Bengal Revolutionary” on M. N. Roy in the *Journal of Asian Studies*; Ralph Nicholas summed up years of research on the Bengal village in “Structures of Politics in the Villages of Southern Asia” in the Singer-Cohn volume *Structure and Change in Indian Society*; and Marcus Franda published his *West Bengal and the Federalizing Process in India*. The regional approach to South Asia which the Bengal specialists had pioneered was producing results.

Broomfield, trained in area studies in Australia, demonstrated in his work that parallel interests had developed between Australia and America with regard to approaches to the history of Bengal. Hay, Inden, and others at Chicago had already recognized a certain unity of self-interest among the long-prevailing upper castes of Bengal who obviously had adapted themselves rather well under the British and constituted a regional elite during the era of colonialism and imperialism. It was precisely here that Broomfield found his primary area of interest, which he eventually developed into the concept of the Bengali *bhadralok*:

At the beginning of the twentieth century Bengali rural and urban society differed in many fundamental respects, yet they shared a common dominant elite. In city, town, and village there was one group of Bengalis who claimed and were accorded recognition as superior in social status to the mass of their fellows. These were the *bhadralok*, literally the “respectable people,” the “gentlemen.” They were distinguished by many aspects of their behavior—their deportment, their speech, their dress, their style of housing, their eating habits, their occupations, and their associations—and quite as fundamentally by their cultural values and their sense of social propriety.51

As a student of Bengali sociopolitical history in the British period, Broomfield framed his monograph on the *bhadralok* in the context of British-Bengali interaction and focused on the institution of the Bengal Legislative Council. Broomfield assessed leading political events in Bengal from 1912 to 1927, addressing himself for the most part to com-
munal relations between Hindus and Muslims from the end of the first
Bengal partition of 1905 to the rise in power of a Muslim bhadralok in
Bengal legislative politics. No book by a Bengal specialist so skillfully
combined the traditional historian’s exciting narrative with the problem-
centered approach of the social scientist.

What Broomfield has contributed, therefore, is a kind of sociology of
Bengal politics in historical perspective. The drama that unfolded under
British rule and administration was that of groupings in a pluralist society
maneuvering to promote their self-interest in competition with one an-
other. Like Kling’s book, Broomfield’s constituted a major breakthrough
in the older British Empire historiography of India, which was essentially
concerned with British diffusion rather than with British-Indian inter-
action. It was not the British who really interested Broomfield but Bengali
elites who had no other choice but to confront the British while at the
same time playing another more crucial role within their own culture and
in competition with one another. This kind of sociological analysis, re-
stricted to one region, also enabled Broomfield to shatter the older gener-
alizations about the liberal moderate nationalists. He humanized them by
demonstrating how their ideological commitment was culturally and
socially determined.

Politics was also Gordon’s primary concern in his article on M. N. Roy as young Bengali revolutionary. But, contrary to Broomfield, it was
not sociology so much as cultural anthropology which shaped Gordon’s
view of “modern” Bengal. The influence of Dimock, Inden, and Chicago
anthropologists was clearly discernable in this valuable article on the
unique features of the Bengal revolutionary. Gordon is perhaps the first
Bengal specialist of the modernist school to have been captivated by the
notion that there are eternal Bengali traits and relationships, or an un-
broken continuity of culture, offering the key, as it were, to understand-
ing Bengali participation in all historical forces and movements.

Although M. N. Roy was a revolutionary nationalist advocating in-
dependence against the British, Gordon felt it unnecessary to refer to any
Englishman at all in Bengal except perhaps those whose names turned up
in CID files. Instead, Gordon’s young man Narendranath (Roy’s real
name) began his revolutionary career in the peculiarly Bengali way: he
was really part of a faction (dal) rather than part of a larger movement;
moreover, the leader of the faction was not an idealistic revolutionary
with charisma but a cross between an elder brother (dādā) and a spiritual
preceptor (guru), and the group of revolutionaries (most of them very
young) were really the leader’s student-disciples (chelā), who considered
one another as coreligionists (gurubhāi). Gordon has presented some
statistics on these factions, and gleaned from the Sedition Committee
Reports (compiled between 1907 and 1917), which seem to indicate that most members of the revolutionary factions were between sixteen and twenty-five years of age and that ninety percent of them were of the three upper castes (Broomfield’s bhadrakok). Also significantly, Bengali, to Gordon, was the warm attachment which developed between disciples and leader within the faction, an attachment far more important than ideology and which meant in effect that with the death of the dāda the dal itself disintegrated.

Ralph Nicholas, who had studied two West Bengal villages in 1960–1961 and has published a number of articles on them since, was the first Bengal specialist in anthropology. In 1968, when his important article in the Singer-Cohn volume appeared, he had turned to the new subdivision of social anthropology called “political anthropology.” The fact that Nicholas found himself the only American anthropologist of Bengal, that he had entered a hybrid field where a great many conceptual problems remained unsolved, meant that he had to create (or at least generalize upon) a model of a village political structure while still digesting a wealth of ethnographic data. He met the challenge more than adequately.

Nicholas defined political activity in terms of power and conflict rather than in terms of administrative authority and action. As he himself put it, “I am talking about the conflict over power, not about administration, government, or the direction of public policy in South Asian villages.” The question he turned to was social cleavage as it typified political conflict in villages. His ethnographic accounts of the two villages suggest two different types of cleavage: the vertical, which divides structurally equivalent political groups “characteristic of the ideal unstratified society,” and the horizontal, which divides “super- and subordinate groups from one another” and is “characteristic of the ideal stratified society.” Vertical cleavages seem to be manifested mostly as factions, “and within certain castes, in the form of divisions between segments of patrilineal descent groups.” Horizontal cleavages, on the other hand, were found in South Asia between castes and “between ruling autocrats and their subjects.”

Nicholas did not freeze his data into a model nor did he suggest anywhere that existing patterns of one or the other variety were not alterable in contemporary India by modernizing processes. He found the village situation remarkably fluid, suggesting perhaps that internal, culturally determined factors were not sufficient in themselves to explain the social and political dynamics of village life. Nicholas, as a historic-minded anthropologist, was quite aware that the historical forces were not merely passive external factors in village society but were processes which could radically alter existing norms and styles. In his final conclusion he states:
Of the changes which have been brought about in rural India by social and economic reform the effects or potential effects of two seem most important. Universal adult franchise generally has a great impact upon the political system of villages in which the dominant caste is a minority of the population. Land reforms, when they become effective, will bring major changes in the political systems of villages in which control over land has been concentrated in a small number of hands.58

As Nicholas was the first Bengal anthropologist, Marcus Franda was the first political scientist. Franda, an area-trained specialist, wrote his first book on the political integration of a culture region in which he had ample opportunity to fuse his scientific understanding of the federalizing process with his acquired sympathy for the state culture of Bengal. What emerged was a study of political culture in which a conflict of issues between the center and state on such concerns as irrigation, land reform, and party government represented the clash between national policy decisions and the realities of local conditions.

By selecting Bengal, Franda had chosen the one region of India which has felt least comfortable in its constitutional role simply as one of many states, continually asserting its autonomy both politically and culturally. He explained this problem initially with a historical account of Bengal, which until 1874 included East and West Bengal, Orissa, Bihar, and Assam and was the most populous region in all South Asia. Then, at independence in 1947, Bengal was reduced to one-seventh the size of Greater Bengal a century ago.59 The fact that Calcutta was capital of British India until 1911, and that Bengalis held most of the privileged positions under imperialism, goes far to explain historically the reason for the twentieth-century Bengali image of crisis, agitation, and rebellion.

Among Franda’s discoveries was that on the highest level of center-state interaction (as evidenced, for example, by the appointment of the States Reorganization Committee by Nehru in 1953) the national policy has been a “middle ground between the alternative paths of coercion and complete surrender to provincial sentiments.”60 As for explaining the Bengali attitude to the center, Franda’s data seem to indicate a high degree of responsiveness by regional politicians to local interests which often clash with national policies and programs. As an illustration he cited an aspect of the Domodar Valley Corporation controversy between local cultivators and the federal government. The Bengalis argued that local improvement was more crucial than completing the second stage of the DVC project. Thus argued Franda: “The West Bengal Congress Party has a reputation for being susceptible to pressure from people who are considered ‘key men’, and for being capable of resisting ideological orientations, and it is on this basis that it has effectively organized the state.”61
This is Franda's most significant conclusion about the effectiveness of Bengali regional demands against the center: "the cohesion and strength of state party units (at least where the dominant party is in power in the state) and the degree to which the populace can be mobilized for political action—play a large part in determining the nature of center-state problems in India."62 Besides Franda's obvious contribution of placing the problem of regions and regionalism in a political context, he has also been the first among Bengal modernists to examine the problem of interaction in the post-British period. The older British subject-British overlord relationship has now been replaced by that of the Bengali politician-Indian national perspective.

The year 1969 witnessed the publication of a monograph on the Bengal renaissance by myself, two more volumes of papers from earlier conferences on identity and urbanism, and Rachel Van M. Baumer's article on literary tradition and modernity in Sankar's novels. My book on the Bengal renaissance followed Broomfield's as the second Bengal monograph in America to be awarded the Watumull Prize.

The Bengal renaissance, a vital component of the Bengali self-image for a century or more and a perennial theme in South Asian historiography, was a sensitive area of scholarship by virtue of having been appropriated as cultural baggage in the ideology of Indian nationalism. This renaissance has been variously interpreted as the search for identity in the modern world, nation-building, linguistic modernization, the flowering of the Bengali literary genius, the socioreligious purification of Hinduism, and the finest hour of creative achievement by the bhadralok. More often than not the origins of that renaissance have been traced back to the arrival in Calcutta in 1815 of Rammohun Roy, a charismatic hero of the Bengali people. From his attitudes and the subsequently evolving institutions associated with his name have been derived all that is modern and progressive about twentieth-century India; from his courageous assault against the citadel of contemporary corrupt Hindu society while at the same time maintaining his cultural integrity against Western critics, he established the prototype of the present-day dynamic Indian who feels no conflict between his heritage and his quest for modernity.

These and other such hypotheses formed the basis of my research on how the renaissance actually got started. As an area-trained specialist with social science exposure, I felt uncomfortable with the Rammohun Roy interpretation partly because of the inadequacy of the Great Man theory as an explanation and partly because of the obvious nationalist bias in minimizing the role of the English, whom I surmised served equally well as a catalyst. I was equally dissatisfied with the British view of the birth of the Bengal renaissance, which placed too much emphasis on
Macaulay's Minute of 1835 as a catalyst. Westernizers argued that Macaulay's minute committed the government to a policy of favoring English education as against the Orientalist policy of obstructing the flow of progress by having sponsored education in the languages of the Indian people.

What I discovered chiefly was that the Bengal renaissance originated through interaction between a group of linguistically competent and culturally sympathetic Britishers known as Orientalists and a group of partially westernized, professional Bengali intermediaries called the intelligentsia. Rammohun was surely a leading figure but he was essentially just one of a new grouping of intelligentsia whose contribution to the renaissance had to be evaluated collectively. As for the Orientalists, my conclusion was that they were neither averse to change, since they did encourage the English language as a means for "native" improvement, nor was their support of the indigenous "oriental" languages so much intended as an obstacle to modern ideas as it was a calculated effort to convey new learning into the spoken, vernacular languages of the people.

By intensively studying the College of Fort William, a pivotal Orientalist training institution for English civil servants established in Calcutta in 1800, I was able to describe fully how Europeans underwent deep changes as a result of becoming intellectually and psychologically acculturated to India. This kind of acculturation produced the progressive Orientalist with a syncretistic modernizing program centered around the assumption that the new wine of nineteenth-century civilization could be poured into the old bottles of Indian institutions and practices with dynamic results. The Orientalist cultural policy for India was therefore not an antithesis to Macaulay's westernizing policy but an alternative. This is why I concluded the book by affirming that the Orientalists played a major role in the birth of Indian renaissance and modernity:

As portrayed in this book, the Orientalists bear little resemblance to the dismal image that has been theirs since the Victorian era. The Orientalists served as avenues linking the regional elite with the dynamic civilization of contemporary Europe. They contributed to the formation of a new Indian middle class and assisted in the professionalization of the Bengali intelligentsia. They started schools, systematized languages, brought printing and publishing to India, and encouraged the proliferation of books, journals, newspapers, and other media of communication. Their impact was urban and secular. They built the first modern scientific laboratories in India, and taught European medicine. They were neither static classicists nor averse to the idea of progress; and they both historicized the Indian past and stimulated a consciousness of history in the Indian intellectual. It was they who transmitted a new sense of identity to Bengalis
that enlarged what Robert Bellah has called “the capacity for rational goal setting,” an instrumental process in the development of a modern outlook.⁶³

I also edited in that year, 1969, the second volume of the Bengal Studies Conference papers entitled Bengal Regional Identity. One of the exciting new fields of Bengali history reported on at the conference was that of the delta region of Bengal from classical times to the rise of Muslim dominance. Barrie Morrison, who had developed an interest in Bengali history and archaeology in the ancient and early middle periods, wrote on “Region and Sub-region in Pre-Muslim Bengal.” Through an analysis of seventy-one inscribed copper plates found in various parts of East and West Bengal and covering the period between A.D. 433 and 1285, Morrison addressed himself to the question of whether or not there was a Bengal.

What Morrison did find of great significance (and which he would elaborate upon in his published monograph a year later) were the four principal political divisions within the area now designated as the delta of Bengal. These political subdivisions of the Bengal region were Varendra, “lying north of the floodplain of the modern Ganges, west of the Jamuna and east of the Mahananda Rivers”;⁶⁴ the Bhagirathi-Hugli area on both banks of the river, encompassing the modern districts of 24 Parganas and Midnapore; the Samatata area comprising the Sylhet-Comilla-Chittagong area east of the Surma and Meghna Rivers; and “the modern Dacca and Faridpur districts which lie at the present confluence of the Padma and Meghna Rivers.”⁶⁵ A detailed study of the four major administrative areas demonstrated “varying political relations with each other and with great variation in the kinds of religious donations made.”⁶⁶ Thus concluded Morrison: “These variations are sufficient to demonstrate that the inscriptions do not provide any evidence of the existence of a Bengal regional identity before the coming of the Muslims.”⁶⁷

Perhaps the most important and challenging implication of Morrison’s research appears in the epilogue to the article where he discussed Bengal cultural identity in the middle period. For years, Dimock and others had cherished a conviction that a Bengal culture pattern had existed in the delta from the ninth century—perhaps earlier—with its distinctive language, literature, religion, social system, and political order. But Morrison argued that “it seems probable that the institutions which would make possible the emergence of a ‘regional identity’ did not come into existence before the thirteenth century or even the nineteenth century.”⁶⁸ The early inhabitants of the delta were a “linguistically and culturally diverse population.”⁶⁹ Among these “heterogeneous people” there was “little evidence of the existence of major political institutions which would bring
them together and provide a focus for any sense of regional identity.”70 After discussing a few hypotheses, Morrison convincingly concluded that:

When the opportunities for the expression of their perception were found under conditions of patronage and peace, such as obtained under the Mughals and the British, the Bengalis produced a rich and varied array of cultural achievements—in literature, sculpture, scholarship, and fine handicrafts. It was through the act of expressing themselves that the population of the Delta began to distinguish themselves as Bengalis and acquire a sense of identity. The expression of this culture left such a brilliant and lasting impression upon Bengalis and the rest of the world that we occupy ourselves trying to understand the origin and content of this culture.71

Dimock’s contribution to the volume, “Muslim Vaiṣṇava Poets of Bengal,” represented his first to deal with the Bengali Muslim in relation to the Bengali Hindu in the middle period, aiming most probably to find the culture pattern and identity in a syncretism between the two. After all, as Dimock noted, “Hindus and Muslims live and have lived for centuries side by side, sharing pastoral and other festivals; and . . . many similarities of the devotional Sufi doctrines to those of the Hindu bhakti make it but a short step from one religion to the other.”72 In fact, Dimock was now seriously considering “syncretistic cults” in Bengal:

We might look briefly at the area of poetry, and within that area, the poetry within the Vaiṣṇava tradition—a tradition usually considered strictly Hindu. It cannot be said that the Muslim Vaiṣṇava poets of Bengal represent a major syncretistic movement, or even that they represent more than a minor example of interaction between the two major traditions. On the other hand, instances of Muslims writing poetry on Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Caitanya, or other Vaiṣṇava themes are not isolated and unique ones.73

Thus the poetry of the Vaiṣṇava tradition links the two communities into a larger Bengali regional culture. A story like Jayadeva’s love of Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa in the Gītagovinda helped break down orthodox Islam and Hinduism in the delta by creating a prototype for the distinctively Bengali love story. Dimock’s selection was superb, as were his comparative references between Sufi and Vaiṣṇava poets treating similar themes. And perhaps most moving of all were his final remarks in which the theme of universalism counterbalances the “parochial” quest for a Bengali regional identity. From the Ain-i-akbari by Abu’l Fazl, Dimock referred to Akbar’s policy of trying to eliminate hostility between Hindus and Muslims with the hope “that the thorn of strife and hatred be caused to bloom into a garden of peace.”74 Concluded Dimock:

Our poets, judging from the language of their poetry, were not educated
men; they were, perhaps, wise and religious men. We know nothing about
them except their poems, and that they, like many Hindus, felt that truth
need not be named, that it is not the possession of any single tradition or
sect. Among some at least, the thorn of strife and hatred may have bloomed
into a garden of poetry and peace.\textsuperscript{75}

Ralph Nicholas developed the same syncretistic idea as Dimock in
"Vaiṣṇavism and Islam in Rural Bengal," but as an anthropologist ob-
serving present conditions in the Bengali village. Thus it was quite natural
indeed for Nicholas to hypothesize that the distinctiveness of Bengali
Vaiṣṇavism and Bengali Islam "is a product of some unique features of
Bengali rural society, and that religious distinctiveness has, in its turn,
contributed to Bengal's regional identity."\textsuperscript{76} To Nicholas one of the
fundamental reasons why Bengal is so distinctive as a culture is because
it is highly distinctive physically. His description of Bengal as the greatest
delta on earth (fifty thousand square miles), of the continuously changing
course of Bengal's major rivers, and of the frontier-type settlement in
rural Bengal (which has followed the best agricultural land eastward and
southward where the rivers were most active) constituted one of the most
succinct geographical introductions to Bengal that exists anywhere. When
one adds Nicholas' observation that Bengal's ethnic homogeneity, so
conspicuously non-Aryan, is probably due to the fact that throughout
classical times it was "beyond the pale of Aryan civilization" and thus
was never "profundely affected by Hindu conceptions of 'proper' social
organization,"\textsuperscript{77} then the sources of Bengali heterodoxy or uniqueness
are easily grasped.

One effective way that Nicholas as a social anthropologist demonstrated
the "significant similarities" between Vaiṣṇavas and Muslims as Bengalis
was to present "parallel sets of religious roles."\textsuperscript{78} Thus in the countryside
there is a similarity between the mendicant Hindu and Muslim (called
bairāgi and fakir, respectively). There is also the role of the gurumurshid
pair defined in relation to the disciple (celā-murid). Both the Hindu guru
and the Muslim murshid function to "initiate the celā or murid into the
mystical knowledge of profound religious experience or religious ec-
stasy."\textsuperscript{79} If they are saintly enough in life, these religious teachers may
in death be treated as saints, and their tombs become sacred areas for
devotees. As Nicholas reported, "there is probably no village in Bengal
that does not have the tomb of a pir (dargā), the tomb of a gosvāī (samad-
hi), or both."\textsuperscript{80}

Of major importance in the article was the theoretical portion in the
conclusion wherein Nicholas reviewed leading concepts of "culture area"
(cultural uniqueness) in anthropology with the end of accepting one or the
other to fit the Bengal case. For example, as he himself did to some extent
in the paper, one might show the “unique properties of [Bengal’s] language and literature, its culture and social structure, its history, and even such elemental characteristics as its physical geography and the biological peculiarities of its inhabitants.” But Nicholas was apparently beginning to favor an idea which Dimock had pursued for years—to direct one’s questions to the “symbolic systems that lie at the center of belief and practice in these religions.” Nicholas was moving toward Lévi-Strauss, one of many anthropologists who argue that “cultures and societies are systems, the components of which function together for the maintenance of the whole.” But Lévi-Strauss had gone even farther: “Each system has a key that reveals the ideal form of all sets of relations within it.” Though Nicholas accepted the idea of rural Bengal as a system, he was not prepared then to name a “key to all its parts.” In fact, he ended his article with a series of questions rather than with generalizations, conceding implicitly that Bengal studies were after all in their infancy.

Among the modernists dealing exclusively with urban elites, Rachel Van M. Baumer, Blair Kling, and Leonard Gordon offered exceedingly fresh papers, demonstrating the strides being taken by Bengal specialists in America. Baumer’s article in particular, “Bankimcandra’s View of the Role of Bengal in Indian Civilization,” generated a kind of intimate rapport between scholar and subject which could only be possible through a deep understanding of the language and an even deeper understanding of the society and culture. Baumer’s article demonstrated the wide world of difference experienced when one crossed over the line between Dimock’s medieval and Nicholas’ village Bengal to the milieu of the Bengal bhadralok and intelligentsia.

As Baumer’s excellent translations indicated, Bankimcandra was a fairly well educated man with a sophisticated sense of humor and satire, as much at home with sustained intellectual prose in the pages of the Baṅgadarśan as he was with creative fiction in the form of short stories and serialized novels. His was a familiar type in the nineteenth-century world: the nervous, ambivalent intellectual holding onto tradition while sinking deeper and deeper into the quicksand of impending modernization. But somewhat more precisely, he was a pioneer of the third-world intelligentsia who stood not merely between tradition and modernity but between Afro-Asia and the West groping through their culture’s past to discover an identity.

In Baumer’s article this process was illuminated exactly. Bankimcandra’s progressive or modernist outlook was evidenced, according to Baumer, in the didactic motivation for writing these articles “designed to instruct Bengalis in the ways necessary for the future restoration of greatness.” Though Bankimcandra was Western-educated and held down a
European position in the civil service, his blueprint for Bengali or Indian revitalization did not include a repudiation of one’s national heritage while undergoing radical westernization. On the contrary, he urged reviewing one’s own past, where a discovery of the real India would reawaken pride in one’s culture and a new sense of identity:

The past held inspiration and lessons for the future; the problems of the present needed recognition and solution in preparation for the future; the future could be as great as Bengalis, working together, wished to make it. Thus history became a tool in the promotion of nationalism, introspection the mental exercise for the restoration of moral fibre, and awakened pride the emotion from which would derive the inspiration to action.\(^{87}\)

But as Baumer has shown all too well, Bankimcandra’s own reading of the Bengali past within the larger framework of Indian civilization was not all that consistent nor was his own quest for an identity ever fully resolved intellectually. In the first place, though Bankimcandra prided himself as a Bengali he was also a proud Brahman with a Brahman’s exaggerated esteem for the golden age of Aryan civilization—a civilization to which Bengal was peripheral. Thus we find Bankimcandra performing subtle mental gymnastics to prove the Aryan purity of Bengali Brahmans and the non-Aryan impurity of the Bengali Sudras who converted en masse to Islam. All the while, as Baumer demonstrated, Bankimcandra attempted to proclaim “that Bengalis were one with other Aryan-descended Indians who shared the glory of that “ancient Aryan race, who were the greatest of all races on earth and our forefathers.”\(^{88}\)

This search for an identity was, as Baumer developed it, a three-stage process composed of the discovery of a golden age, the discovery of a dark age, and the ideology of future recovery contingent largely on a correct historical assessment of one’s golden and dark ages. Why did India decline? Because “in his view, Brahmans became greedy and tyrannical, Ksatriyas, weak and luxury-seeking, and Sudras, passive and unprotesting.”\(^{89}\) He asked, what have we become? And he answered, “Bengalis lack physical strength, Hindus lack virility, while India lacks social cohesion and unity of purpose.”\(^{90}\) The way to future recovery was, according to Bankim:

The nation whose historical recollections of former greatness remain tries to keep that greatness, or if lost, to restore it again. Blenheim and Waterloo are results of the memories of Crécy and Agincourt. Even though Italy fell, she has risen again. Today the Bengalis want to become great—alas! where is the historical memory of Bengalis?\(^{91}\)

In Blair Kling’s article “Entrepreneurship and Regional Identity in Bengal,” though he treated the same bhadrlok class to which Bankim-