Modern India: 1885-1947 was planned some years back as part of a collective attempt to write the history of India in six volumes. Its publication now as an independent work requires a brief justification of its starting point. While 1885 was chosen mainly for convenience it can be argued that what is recognizably 'modern' India began not with the Mughal break-up or with Plassey, but during the latter half of the nineteenth century. It was during these decades that colonial political and economic domination attained its finished apparently stable form, while its counterpoints had also started developing alike at the level of autonomous popular movements and of 'middle class' or intelligentsia based all-India nationalism. The period with which I deal relates to the subsequent unfolding of these contradictions down to the achievement of independence.

The present work has a twofold aim. It attempts a synthesis of the massive data unearthed in recent years by the flood of monographs on specific problems in political, social and economic history. At the same time it explores, in the light of my own research interests, the possibilities of a 'history from below' as distinct from the usual tendency in the historiography of Indian nationalism to concentrate on the activities, ideals, or factional manoeuvres of leaders.

This book would have been inconceivable without the massive research output in modern Indian history during recent years. The format did not permit the usual acknowledgements through footnotes except in the case of direct quotations, but I have tried to honour my debts by lists of Further Readings which appear at the end of the book, arranged chapterwise.

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The responsibility for errors remains mine alone.

Sumit Sarkar