This book was conceived in Calcutta, developed in London, reconceptualised and rewritten in Cambridge and Berlin, and ultimately completed in Reading. It has taken me more than ten years. I am deeply indebted to many institutions and individuals. The Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine at University College London awarded me a three-year doctoral studentship (2005) as well as the Roy Porter Prize (2006), which enabled me to put together my doctoral dissertation. I have since then held postdoctoral fellowships at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta (2009–2010), at the Department of History and Philosophy of Science at the University of Cambridge (2011–2013), and at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science in Berlin (2013–2015). A generous Medical History and Humanities grant from the Wellcome Trust (ref. 091630/Z/10/Z) supported my time in Cambridge. I am also grateful to the Governing Body of Christ’s College, Cambridge, for including me as a postdoctoral affiliate. I spent a part of the fall of 2012 in New York as the Barnard-Columbia Weiss International Visiting Scholar in the History of Science. I thank colleagues in these different institutions for their support while I was working on this book.

My teachers in Calcutta have inspired me, ever since I was an undergraduate, to pursue professional research. Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty and Rajat Kanta Ray at Presidency College, and Bhaskar Chakrabarty, Shireen Maswood, Madhumita Majumdar and Samita Sen at the University of Calcutta exposed me to the various predicaments of South Asian history. I was introduced to interdisciplinary research when I was a student at the Research and Training Programme at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences Calcutta. The courses offered by Sibaji Bandyopadhyay, Gautam Bhadra, Pradip Bose, Partha Chatterjee, Rosinka Chaudhari, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Janaki Nair, Manas Ray and Laksimi Subramanian continue to inform my work. The last ten years have witnessed my own transition from a student to a faculty member. I thank
my colleagues at the Department of History at the University of Reading for setting exemplary standards of collegiality.

I am grateful to Lucy Rymer, Commissioning Editor at the Cambridge University Press, as well as the two anonymous readers for their insights and incisive suggestions. Simon Schaffer and Jim Secord included this book as part of the Science in History series, and along with Lucy, oversaw the transition of the draft manuscript into a book. I can never thank them enough. Sanjoy Bhattacharya (my supportive PhD supervisor) and David Arnold, Partha Chatterjee, Anne Hardy, Mark Harrison and Peter Robb commented extensively on a full draft of my doctoral dissertation, and in so doing, inspired its substantial recasting. Deborah Coen, Angela Creager, James Delbourgo, Cathy Gere, Philipp Lehmann and Sujit Sivasundaram offered crucial suggestions on the introductory chapter. Bodhisattva Kar, Chitra Ramalingam and Pratik Chakrabartti devoted their precious time in commenting on a chapter each. Megan Barford, James Hall and James Poskett read multiple drafts of different parts of the manuscript, and I am especially grateful to them. I thank the generous staff at the Asiatic Society, the National Library, and the West Bengal State Archives in Calcutta, the National Archives of India in New Delhi, the British Library, London Metropolitan Archives and the Wellcome Library in London, and the Whipple Library, the Centre for South Asian Studies library and the University Library in Cambridge for all their help. Without the support of Ashim Mukhopadhyay and Kashshaf Ghani, my research at the Asiatic Society and at the National Library would have remained incomplete. Kamalika Mukherjee and Abhijit Bhattacharya shared with me their unique knowledge of the archives at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences in Calcutta. Apurba Podder and Will Acquino helped this technologically challenged historian with the preliminary formatting of the manuscript.

Parts of Chapter 3 were published in Saurabh Dube (ed.) Modern Makeovers: The Oxford Handbook of Modernity in South Asia, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011). An earlier version of Chapter 5 was published as ‘Quinine, Mosquitoes and Empire: Reassembling Malaria in British India, 1890–1910’ in South Asian History and Culture, 4.1 (January 2013). I thank the editors and anonymous readers for their critical feedback.

I am particularly grateful to Deborah Coen and Sujit Sivasundaram for their intellectual generosity. I thank Ishita Banerjee-Dube, Chris Bayly, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Supriya Chaudhuri, Hal Cook, Roger Cooter, Joya Chatterji, Lorraine Daston, Faisal Devji, Saurabh Dube, Sven Dupre, Shruti Kapila, Joan Landes, Veronika Lipphardt, Hugh Raffles, Anupama Rao, Biswajit Ray, Anne Secord, David Sepkoski, Sonu...
Shamdasani, Emma Spary and John Harley Warner for their encouraging comments and incisive suggestions.


Urmimala Ghosh and Sreecheta Das, and Rekha and Amal Bhowmick provided me a home in Calcutta on innumerable occasions when the manuscript was being researched, written and revised. I hoped to write an engaging book that Samar Das would have appreciated! My grandfather, M. L. Deb, almost reached a hundred years hoping to see my book in print, before giving up all too suddenly. I thank Rinki Deb Ray and Pradip Bhowmick for being there for me.

Joyasree and Amitabha Deb Roy are amongst my very best friends. I am privileged to have them as my parents: A cliché has never been truer! I am following in their footsteps by pursuing academic research and teaching. All along, they have quietly and wholeheartedly supported me. This book is dedicated to them. Shinjini Das has endured a quinine-bitter-half over the past decade, while developing her own research and career in South Asian history. For her companionship, patience and invaluable perspectives that have enriched me, and this project, I say: Thank you!