

# G A U R :

## ITS RUINS AND INSCRIPTIONS.

BY THE LATE

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# GAUR :

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### CHAPTER I.

#### GAUR IN ITS RUINS.

**C**ONCEALED in deep jungle, and situated in perhaps one of the least-civilized districts of the Bengal Presidency, are to be found the ruins of Gaur, or Lak'hnautí, once the capital and the most populous city of Eastern India, as well under the Hindú, as under the first Muhammadan dynasties.

These ruins are situated about eight miles to the south of Angrézabád (English Bázár), the civil station of the district of Máldah, and on the eastern bank of the Bhágíráthí, a stream which joins the Ganges below Gaur. The present course of the latter river, now distant some six miles to the westward, appears to be fast cutting its way back towards the old city, beneath the walls of which it formerly flowed nearly in the same course as that now occupied by the Bhágíráthí. This is the generally accepted opinion, though some accounts relate that the Ganges flowed to the east, and that the great embankments which still exist in that direction were constructed to protect the city from its encroachments. The natural features of the surrounding country in some degree favour this opinion, for the entire district of Máldah is interspersed with large tracts of low ground, swamps, and hollows, overgrown with the hijal-tree (*Barringtonia acutangula*), which may not improbably, in times gone by, have formed the beds of one or more great rivers.

The traditions that have been handed down of the wealth and magnificence

of Gaur would appear almost fabulous, did not the immense space covered by its ruins, the extent of its walls, the magnificent proportions of its gateways, and the elaborate architecture of its public buildings and palaces, all bear testimony that the traditions in this case are no fictions. The history of the city, under Hindú rule, is lost in the lapse of centuries since the Muhammadan conquest in A.H. 595 (A.D. 1198).<sup>\*</sup> It is known to have attained its magnificence under the Moslem rule, and to have continued great till the middle of the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese historian, Faria y Souza, describes it as containing 1,200,000 inhabitants, and as so crowded that, at the time of religious festivals and processions, numbers of people were trodden to death. The streets are stated to have been broad, straight, and lined on both sides with trees to protect the populace from the rays of the sun.

Vandalism, as well as Time, has contributed to the general destruction of the ancient capital. There is not a village, scarce a house, in the district of Máldah, or in the surrounding country, that does not bear evidence of having been partially constructed from its ruins. The cities of Murshidábád, Máldah, Rájmahál, and Rangpúr, have almost entirely been built with materials from Gaur, and even its few remaining edifices are being daily despoiled.

The term Gaur not only includes the city within its fortified walls, but also its extensive suburbs. The walled city was probably about ten miles long, by one mile and a half broad, but the environs extended to twenty miles in length by three or four in width.

The boundary embankments still exist: they were works of vast labour, and were, on the average, about 40 feet in height, being from 180 to 200 feet at the base. The facing throughout was of masonry, and numerous buildings and edifices appear to have crowned their summits; but the whole of the masonry has now disappeared, and the embankments are overgrown with a dense jungle, impenetrable to man and affording a safe retreat for various beasts of prey. The eastern embankment was double, a deep moat, about 150 yards wide, separating the two lines. A main road ran north and south through the city, its course being still traceable by the remains of bridges and viaducts. The western face of the city is now open, and probably always was so, having been well protected by the Ganges, which, as already observed, ran under its walls. In the centre of the north and south embankments are openings, showing that

<sup>\*</sup> This is the date assumed by Mr. Blochmann, J.B.A.S. XLIV. Pt. 1, p. 276. Mr. Thomas fixes it four years later, and Major Raverty as many years earlier, or in A.D. 1194.—A. G.

these fortifications had been perforated to afford ingress to and egress from the city. At the northern entrance there are no remains, but at the southern still stands the Kutwálí Gate, a beautiful ruin measuring fifty-one feet in height under the archway.

Within the space enclosed by these embankments and the river, stood the city of Gaur proper, and in the south-west corner was situated the Fort containing the palace, of which it is deeply to be regretted that so little is left. Early in the present century there was much to be found here worthy of notice, including many elegantly carved marbles; but these are said to have become the prey of the Calcutta undertakers and others for monumental purposes. On the road-side, between the palace and the Bhágíráthí river, there now lies, split in twain, a vast block of hornblende, which, having been carried thus far, has been dropped and left as broken on the highway to bear its testimony against the spoilers. Surrounding the palace is an inner embankment of similar construction to that which surrounds the city, and even more overgrown with jungle. A deep moat protects it on the outside.

Radiating north, south, and east from the city, other embankments are to be traced running through the suburbs, and extending in certain directions for thirty or forty miles. These include the great causeways, or main roads leading to the city, which were constructed by Sultan Ghiyásuddín.\* The greater part of them were metalled, and here and there they are still used as roads, but most of them are, like those within the city, overgrown with thick jungle.

The whole country within the fortifications, and indeed, for many miles around, is wild, and studded with numerous tanks or reservoirs, which, with one exception, are overgrown with rank grass and reeds, and abound in alligators. The undulations of the surface are caused by fallen ruins; and the unproductive character of the soil, mingled as it is with broken bricks and *débris*, has, until within the last few years, prevented any attempt to bring it under cultivation. Mustard crops are now raised upon it, and in the month of December the

\* Minháj-i-Saráj, the author of the *Tabakát-i-Násiri*, who visited Gaur in 641 A.H. (1243 A.D.) or seventeen years after Ghiyásuddín's death, thus speaks of these important causeways: "From Lakhanavati to the gate of the city of Lakhan-or, on the one side and as far as Díw-kot on the other side, the Sultán Ghiyásud-Dín Iwaz caused an embankment to be constructed, extending about ten days' journey, for this reason, that in the rainy season the whole of that tract becomes inundated and that route is filled with mud-swamps and morass, and if it were not for these dykes, it would be impossible for people to carry out their intentions, or reach the various structures and inhabited places, except by means of boats. From his time, through the construction of these embankments, the route was opened up to the people at large."—Bib. Indica, *Tabakát-i-Násiri*, Raverty's translation, p. 586.—A. G.

whole country is golden with a profusion of mustard-blossom, relieved by creepers and wild flowers. As the cold season advances the scene varies, but is still attractive, for the country abounds in Símul or silk cotton trees (*Bombax malabaricum*), and in January their leafless branches burst into bloom with brilliant crimson flowers, the glare of which is softened by the delicate green of the tamarind trees. A month later the Símul flowers fade and the pods shed their silky fibre, which, falling on the ground, covers it, as it were, with a coating of snow.

Such is Gaur of the present day : a lamentable wreck of its former elegance and grandeur.