Gaur as ‘Monument’: The Making of an Archive and Tropes of Memorializing

Parjanya Sen

In his book *The Ruins of Gour* Henry Creighton, one of the first among a series of early English explorers to the site describes Gaur as ‘an uninhabited waste’, ‘concealed in deep jungle, and situated in one of the least civilized districts of the Bengal Presidency’.\(^1\) Describing the ruins in hyperbolic rhetoric, Creighton writes:

> In passing through so large an extent of formal grandeur, once the busy scene of men, nothing presents itself but these few remains. Trees and high grass now fill up the space, and shelter a variety of wild creatures, bears, buffaloes, deer, wild hogs, snakes, monkees, peacocks, and the common domestic fowl, rendered wild for want of an owner. At night the roar of the tiger, the cry of the peacock, and the howl of the jackals, with the accompaniment of rats, owls, and trouble-some insects, soon become familiar to the few inhabitants still in its neighbourhood.\(^2\)

A similar rhetoric may be found in Fanny (Parlby) Parks’s description of Gaur in her memoirs. Parks travelled extensively in India during the 1830s. On visiting Gaur, she appears to have been delighted by these ‘picturesque’ ruins amidst a ‘country’ ‘remarkably beautiful’, and enamoured by the site, covered with the silk cotton tree, the date palm, and various other trees; and there was a large sheet of water, covered by high jungle grass, rising far above the heads of men who were on foot.

> On the clear dark purple water of a large tank floated the lotus in the wildest luxuriance; over all the trees the jungle climbers twisted and twined; and the parasitical plants, with their red flowers, were in bunches on the branches.\(^3\)

Exactly 100 years after Creighton, Abid Ali Khan, an employee working in the Public Works department under the British Government, claiming descent from the ‘ancient family of Pathan rulers of Gaur…’ whose ‘ancestors came with King Firuz Shah from Delhi and settled in Gaur’,\(^4\) was granted the title of ‘Khan Sahib’, in

---


3 Fanny Parks, *Wanderings Of A Pilgrim In Search Of The Picturesque, During Four-and-twenty Years In The East; with Revelations Of Life In The Zenana*, vol. 2, London: Pelham Richardson, 23, Cornhill, 1850, 84.

recognition of service to the government. At the time, he recorded the event in his memoirs as follows:

I entered the P.W.D in 1899 and was put in charge of the special repairs to the old buildings at Gaur and Pandua. Since then I have been discharging these duties besides carrying out other Civil works of the Department. In recognition of my services, Government was pleased to confer upon me the title of ‘Khan Sahib’ in the year 1917.  

For me, the above declamations mark two very different concerns and set of engagements with the ‘monument’ in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century in British India. While Creighton’s and Parks’s claims may be said to be part of a larger history of colonial exploration which, in the second half of the nineteenth century, sought to produce India as an exotic landscape, Abid Ali’s claim, despite his location as a ‘servant’ employed by the British Government, shows how monumental heritage becomes central to the process of production of religious/nationalist pasts. Creighton’s claim is representative of an earlier moment of encounter between the European explorer and the colony’s ruins. The rhetoric deployed by both Creighton and Parks is characteristic of early colonial writings on ‘Oriental’ monuments, before the beginning of a more systemic and institutionalised engagement with these sites. It sees the monument as part of a larger ‘picturesque’ landscape — wild and overflowing with flora and fauna, which seems to seduce the European explorer’s gaze. Abid Ali’s response to the site of Gaur, on the other hand, marks a different moment of encounter with the site, where the subjective claim is fore-grounded in order to link the monument to the very process of formation of a nationalist and Islamic past.

This paper thus sets out to address a series of claims and concerns which emerge in British India around the monuments of Gaur and Pandua, the capital cities of the Ilyas Shahi and the Husain Shahi dynasties of Sultanate Bengal. I intend to look at how the ‘monument’ is not only produced as a discursive text around which histories and identities can be fashioned, but it also becomes an affective space around which multiple pasts can be conjured. How exactly can these engagements be located within a larger set of historical/archaeological concerns which were intricately linked with the colonial project and a desire to invest the colony with a history? Also, what regional specificity does Gaur attain within this larger network of historiographical/archaeological claims?

The city of Gaur was one of the largest medieval cites of the subcontinent, and was the capital of Muslim Bengal from c. 1450 A.D. to 1565 A.D. under the Ilyas Shahi, the Husain Shahi and the Restored Ilyas Shahi dynasties. Located on the eastern strip of land between the Ganges and the Mahananda rivers, and south of

---

6 Instead of using the hyphenated name ‘Gaur-Pandua’ I have used the term ‘Gaur’ as a signifier referring not only to the monuments of both the cities, but the larger way in which they exist within scholarship and popular imagination. The name ‘Pandua’ has been used individually as and where applicable.
the present town of Malda, it today survives only in ruins, covering an area nearly twenty miles in length and four miles in breadth. The earlier name of the city was Lakshmanavati which was later Islamized as Lakhnavati. Pandua, located about twenty miles from Gaur and twelve miles from Malda, is believed to have been the earlier capital of Bengal during the reign of Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah (1342-1358 A.D.). Ilyas Shah renamed it as Firuzabad in 1353 probably after Shamsuddin Firuz Shah (1301-1322 A.D.). During the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, power seems to have been constantly shifting between these two capital cities of Gaur and Pandua. From the historical sources available to us, it may be gleaned that Pandua/Firuzabad was the earlier capital in the fourteenth century, and that Gaur really rose in importance during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah.

A. The Brick Ruins: Early Explorations to Gaur

As mentioned earlier, both Creighton’s and Parks’s evocative declamation of Gaur marks an earlier moment of encounter between the enterprising European explorer and the colony’s ‘picturesque’ ruins. The accounts left by four Englishmen—Robert Orme who visited the site in 1760, Henry Creighton in 1786, Reuben Burrow in 1787, and the cartographer James Rennell in the 1770s—mark the beginning of a colonial enquiry into Gaur. In this context it must, however, be remembered that the accounts left by the British explorers are not the first European engagements with the city of Gaur. Thomas Pires, writing from Malaya in 1511-12, describes the great ‘city of Bengala’ which has been taken by historians such as Aniruddha Ray as a reference to Gaur. About forty years later, J.H. Ravenshaw, the then Collector of

---

7 It needs to be mentioned here that Alexander Cunningham marks the area of Lakshmanavati as located north of Gaur.

8 An inscription dated December, 1457 during the reign of Sultan Nasiruddin Mahmud Shah I (1435-1459) on a bridge erected by him on the road from the Kotwali Durwaza (presently on the border of the nation-states of India and Bangladesh) suggests a possible date of transfer of the capital to Gaur from Hazrat Pandua.


The monuments presently visible in situ at Gaur include the Kotwali Durwaza, now dividing India and Bangladesh, the Bada Sona or the Baradwari Masjid, the Firuz Minar, the Dakhil Durwaza, the Chika monument, the Baisagzi wall and the central palace area, The Qadam Rasul and Fath Shah’s Tomb, the Lukochuri Durwaza, the Gunmant Masjid, the Tantipara Masjid and the Lattan Masjid in India; and the Darasbari Mosque and Madrasa, the Chhota Sona Masjid and the Dhunichowk Masjid in Bangladesh. The monuments visible in situ at Pandua include the Adina Masjid, the Eklakhi Mausoleum, the Chhota Dargah or the Dargah of Nur Qub-i ‘Alam and the Bada Dargah or the Dargah of Shah Jalal, and the Qutub Shahi Masjid. Later day monuments (not geographically located within the cities but dated to Sultanate Gaur) include the Jahanian or Jhanjhaniya Masjid and the Samadhi of Ankih Sirajuddin.

Malda, surveyed the ruins and published a book entitled *Gaur, Its Ruins and Inscriptions* which contains a lot of well illustrated photographs. Ratnabali Chatterjee remarks in her essay, ‘The Search for a Lost City: Gau- Lakhnavati’, ‘In a way Ravenshaw brought the journey of amateur explorers to a close.’

Both Aniruddha Ray and Ratnabali Chatterjee’s claims seem to be played off against a colonial archive, which seems to provide the basic disciplinary framework for accessing the monument’s past. The colonial archive itself becomes a series of citations in passing, whereby every historian writing on Gaur keeps invoking a past history of exploration and imaging. This is also similarly true of early writers on Gaur, like Henry Creighton whose book *The Ruins of Gour, Described and Represented in Eighteen Views; With a Topographical Map* becomes a compendium of sorts, variously invoking Reuben Burrow, Rennell and Robert Orme. Creighton’s writing, particularly his map of Gaur, would similarly become the defining paradigm for the works of later writings on Gaur, such as the *Journal of Major William Francklin* in 1819-11, or Dr. Buchanan Hamilton’s descriptions which were published in the *Journal of the Asiatic Society* in 1883.

Creighton’s book was posthumously compiled in 1817, from his manuscripts and drawings which he had made during his stay in Malda from 1786-1807. Creighton was at the time employed as a mercantile assistant to a certain Mr. Charles Grant who was holding the office of Commercial Resident at the East India Company’s factory in the district of Malda and was looking after the export of raw silk and cotton piece-goods. Grant, however, soon established an indigo factory at Guamalati (Gowmalty), not far from the ruins of Gaur, and employed Creighton to superintend it. This was where Creighton remained till his premature death at the age of 40.

While Ratnabali Chatterjee claims that it is Ravenshaw who marks a moment of departure from amateur exploration into a more systemic engagement with historical ruins, what strikes me as far more interesting is how Creighton’s or later Ravenshaw’s work, rather than signalling a discursive break, becomes representative of a larger process of building of the colonial archive. Within it, visual documentation plays an important function and plays itself out across various registers, such as the cartographic map, the sketches (later developed into lithographs), the aquatints, and later, the photographs.

Creighton’s map of Gaur is perhaps the earliest documented one of the site in its entirety. Engraved by Thomas Medland and later rendered into a coloured aquatint by Thomas Fisher in 1811(figure 1), Creighton’s cartographic map of Gaur becomes a defining paradigm for later writers including Ravenshaw and even Alexander Cunningham. This simultaneous existence of the various genres of visual records of Gaur begins to provide a certain paradigm of looking at/ reading the monument. Through this process of rendering of the site as archive, the material

---

10 Ratnabali Chatterjee, ‘The Search for a Lost City: Gau- Lakhnavati’, Prof. ABM Habibullah Centenary Celebration: Reading Indian Medieval History, Department of Islamic History, Calcutta University, Kolkata, 7 March 2012.
ruins *in situ* seem to recede in importance as the colonial archive becomes the determining framework of access to the monument.

In the case of Gaur, the on-site sketches by William Baillie (whose sketch of the Firuz Minar is the earliest surviving visual record of the same), Samuel Davis, Thomas Daniell, Robert Hyde Colbrooke, the Indian artist Seeta Ram, Major William Francklin (whose architectural drawings become part of his *Journal of a Route from Rajmahal to Gour*, 1810-11) and later the photographs of Joseph David Beglar, archaeological surveyor and assistant to Alexander Cunningham, mark the various genres of images which become part of the colonial archive on Gaur.

The earliest visual record of the monuments of Gaur is by William Baillie (1752/53-99) who was a cadet in the Bengal army and then a lieutenant in the Bengal Engineers. His three sketches of Gaur, ‘Ruined Gateway in the Baisgazi wall with the remains of a hexagonal tower’ (figure 2), ‘Kotwali Durwaza’ and ‘Ruins of Firuz Minar’ were intended for inclusion in his proposed publication entitled *Picturesque Ruins at Gaur*, as advertised in the Calcutta Gazette on 5 December, 1758.

Pratip Kumar Mitra has written that Baillie’s drawing, in ink and grey wash, ‘is faithful to the locale, with tall coconut trees and shrubs of bamboo set in the background’. I would instead argue here that Baillie’s sketch, rather than being a ‘faithful’ representation, needs to be read as part of a larger tradition of ‘picturesque’ representation of the colony’s ruins. This pre-occupation with the ‘picturesque’ aesthetics of representation, where the monumental ruins are seen

---

11 All three of the plates, as does most of the visual archive on Gaur, are housed in the Prints, Drawings and Photographs Section in the Asia, Pacific & Africa (formerly referred to as the Oriental & India Office) Collections of the British Library. Only the one plate entitled ‘Ruined Gateway in the Baisgazi wall with the remains of a hexagonal tower’ is available online in the British Library website, which I have replicated here.

almost as extensions of the natural backdrop within which they are located, itself gestures towards a series of early encounters between the European artist/explorer and the historical ruins of the colony.

Regarding ‘picturesque’ aesthetics G.H.R. Tillotson writes:

The idea of the Picturesque began to acquire its distinctive form in the mid-eighteenth century. Originally it was a vogue for looking at the natural landscape in a manner informed by principles derived from paintings, notably from the works of such seventeenth-century masters as Claude Lorraine, Salvatore Rosa and Gaspard Poussin... What the Picturesque required of the artist in practice was, first, that his painted landscape should be generally harmonious and coherently composed, including a good depth of field, preferably divisible into three grounds. It was to be, in other words, frankly artificial. In addition the classically approved but now ridiculed ‘smoothness’ was rejected in favour of a certain ‘roughness’, which offered a greater variety of form and line. There was a preference for abrupt shapes such as irregular hills and buildings. There was also a strong predilection for intricate detail, especially in the foreground, which could be littered with stones or plants or broken statuary. The work should contain some reference to man’s presence in the landscape: a wandering traveller or toiling peasant,
perhaps; or a ruin that was both picturesquely irregular in itself and a reminder of man’s transience.\textsuperscript{13}

The early visual documentation of Gaur thus needs to be located within this larger historiography of encounter, as a result of which the site itself is repeatedly produced and re-produced. It is also little wonder therefore that Gaur becomes part of the much celebrated Oriental Scenery of the Daniells. Uncle and nephew, Thomas and William, who listed themselves as ‘engravers’ with the East India Company and arrived in Calcutta early in 1786, undertook an ambitious tour of Northern India, sketching as they went, inspired by and wishing to out-do William Hodges whose collection of aquatints, Select Views in India (1785–8) had in many ways opened up India to the West. The Daniells stayed with Samuel Davis, a civil servant posted at Bhagalpur and later the Director of the East India Company and also a skilled amateur artist, on two separate occasions— for three days during their upstream journey across the Ganges in October, 1789 and for a considerable period of time during their return trip, in the second half of 1791. During the latter period, the Daniells visited Gaur, accompanied by Davis. Two views of Gaur were rendered as aquatints and on their return to England published as part of Oriental Scenery, a mammoth collection of 144 coloured acquaints and six uncoloured title pages, published in six parts over the period 1795–1808. The first of these, entitled ‘Ruins at the Antient City of Gour formerly on the Banks of the River Ganges’ was published as Plate IV in Set I of Oriental Scenery. It shows a section of the Dakhil Darwaza located within a ‘picturesque’ backdrop (figure 3). The second, ‘A Minar at Gour’, which is a view of the Firuz Minar, became Plate XXIII of Set V of Oriental Scenery called ‘Antiquities of India’ (figure 4). Davis himself painted a set of pictures of Gaur, among them one which shows the Kotwali Darwaza. Regarding this painting, which is now part of a private collection, Mildred Archer, in her book on the Daniells, writes, ‘Samuel Davis almost certainly accompanied the Daniells to Gaur; he recorded the Kotwali Gate and in his drawing it may well be Thomas who is seated sketching.’\textsuperscript{14}

Archer also provides an account of the aquatint ‘Ruins at the Antient City of Gour’ (figure 3) referring to an episode published in the Oriental Annual of 1835 where Thomas includes a vivid, ‘but perhaps imaginary’ account of the shooting of a wild pig at Gaur by William Daniell.\textsuperscript{15} In the aquatint which depicts the Dakhil Darwaza as ‘picturesque’ ruin, a wild pig is visible hiding in the tall grass in front. On top of the wall of the gate, towards the right, two figures can be seen. The standing figure on the right who seems to be holding a gun is probably William, going by Thomas Daniell’s account regarding the shooting of the pig.

\textsuperscript{15} Archer, Early Views of India, 136-37.
Parjanya Sen  
Gaur as ‘Monument’: the making of an archive and tropes of memorializing

Figure 3. Thomas Daniell, *Ruins at the Antient City of Gour*, Plate 4, *Oriental Scenery I*, 1795. Coloured aquatint (43.5, 60.2). London: Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, the British Library. ©British Library Board P914.

Although Mitra’s essay remains perhaps the first of its kind to catalogue the visual archive on Gaur, Mitra sees the paintings (which he describes in terms of the authenticity of their representation of the architecture visible in situ) as individual and isolated efforts by various artists. What is far more important to me is to be able to tease out the links, not just between the representations themselves, but also the artists, so as to locate them within a larger historiography of representation. It is no small coincidence that William Baillie, who pioneered the visual archive on Gaur, was a friend of the Daniells in Calcutta and wrote, quite contemptuously, regarding Thomas’s aquatints, in a letter dated November 23, 1793, ‘All Daniells’ Views were stained principally by natives.’

This archive is further complicated by a series of watercolour paintings made by the Indian artist, Seeta Ram, who accompanied Francis Rawdon or Lord Moira (1754-1823), afterwards the Marquess of Hastings, who was appointed the Governor-General of Bengal and the Commander-in-Chief (from 1813-1823), to illustrate his expedition to Bengal in 1817 and his convalescent tour in the Rajmahal Hills in the winter of 1820-21. The series by Seeta Ram, which includes nine paintings of the ‘monuments’ of Gaur and Pandua, six of which are on Gaur, is entitled ‘Views by Seeta Ram from Malda to Gunga Pursaad’ and was produced in three volumes between 1817 and 1821.

Seeta Ram’s representation of the Firuz Minar, entitled ‘The five storeyed tower at Gaur known as the Pir Asa Minar or Firoz Shah Minar’ (figure 5) shows the monument itself in the background and a sprawling Palash tree in bloom in the foreground. Although painted at a chronologically later date, it may be interesting to compare Seeta Ram’s rendering of the minar with the Thomas Daniell’s aquatint

Figure 5 Seeta Ram, The five storeyed tower at Gaur known as the Pir Asa Minar or Firoz Shah Minar, ‘Views by Seeta Ram from Malda to Gunga Pursaad,’ 1817. Watercolour (36.5, 45). London: Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, the British Library. ©British Library Board Add.Or.4888.
(figure 4). Whereas Seeta Ram’s representation shows a highly romanticized view which is essentially ‘picturesque’ in quality, Thomas Daniell’s aquatint, although it does not completely move out of the ‘picturesque’ trope especially with its spattering of ‘native’ figures in front, is nevertheless far more ‘documentary’ in approach and records the monument in precise architectural detail, including the ‘bell and chain’ motif on the panels of the external wall.

The minar itself has been variously claimed as a victory tower, a structure for summoning the faithful to prayer, or as a monument commemorating the deeds of Sultan Saif-al-din Firuz Shah (1487-90 A.D.) Also, it is the monument which most intrigued the colonizer’s gaze, being recurrently painted by almost every artist/expplorer who visited Gaur. Robert Hyde Colbrooke (1762-1808), who entered the East India Company as officer of the Bengal Infantry and later became Surveyor General in 1808, undertook extensive surveys in various parts along the Ganges from 1794 to 1797. In the course of these surveys he visited Gaur in 1794 and the only monument he visually recorded was the Firuz Minar. The view, entitled ‘Tower among ruins, Gaur (Bengal)’ (figure 6), which is neither as romanticized as Seeta Ram’s rendering nor as meticulous in terms of ‘documentary’ detail as Thomas Daniell’s aquatint, nevertheless remains firmly implicated within the ‘picturesque’ aesthetics of landscape painting.

Why the minar seduces the colonizer’s gaze more than the other monuments is a matter of some conjecture. Fanny Parks, whose description of Gaur I have referred to earlier, also appears to have been smitten by the form of this ‘column of solid masonry, within which winds a circular stair’, which she misrecognizes as one
probably built by Akbar as a ‘hunting tower’, similar to the tower at Fatehpur Sikri, but ‘much more beautifully situated, with a greater command of country’, ‘from the top of which the emperor massacred his game at leisure’.\textsuperscript{17} Mitra has noted:

One wonders then why a tower-like edifice had become the favourite subject of so many European painters when there were such magnificent mosques like Sona, Lattan, Tantipara and Gunmant among the ruins of Gaur. Perhaps, an elegant tower was more familiar and attractive to the Western audience than the Saracenic architecture blended with complex Indo-Islamic geometric designs that formed the basic scheme of a Gaur mosque.\textsuperscript{18}

While Mitra’s explanation of the European painters’ visual obsession with the ‘tower-like edifice’ seems to be in a dialogue with James Fergusson’s notion of Indian architecture (which I discuss in the subsequent section of this paper), the very obsession with its structural form, as can possibly be deduced from the above instances, seems to perhaps suggest that within a masculinist configuring of a feminized ‘Oriental’ landscape, this form of the tower may have served as a phallic externalization of the colonizer’s desire of power over the ‘Orient’. Fanny Parks’s description of it as a ‘beautiful object seen above the woods, or through the intervals between the trees’\textsuperscript{19} and her immediate association of the tower-like form with the sport of ‘hunting’ may serve to further corroborate this deduction.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure7.jpg}
\caption{Seeta Ram, The walls of Gaur, with a tank in which elephants are bathing, and Lord Hastings’ encampment in the foreground, ‘Views by Seeta Ram from Malda to Gunga Pursaad,’ 1817. Watercolour (36.5, 46.4). London: Asia, Pacific and Africa Collections, the British Library. ©British Library Board Add.Or.4889.}
\end{figure}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17} Parks, \textit{Wanderings Of A Pilgrim}, 85.
\textsuperscript{18} Mitra, ‘Rediscovering Gaur’, 14.
\textsuperscript{19} Parks, \textit{Wanderings Of A Pilgrim}, 85.
\end{flushright}
Returning to Seeta Ram, among his other plates on Gaur, two are renderings of the Baisgazi wall, the structure surrounding the central citadel or palace-area. Among these, the one entitled ‘The walls of Gaur, with a tank in which elephants are bathing, and Lord Hastings’ encampment in the foreground’, visually marks the intervention of the European colonizer (figure 7). In Plate IX of Daniells’s Set I of Oriental Scenery entitled ‘Gate of the Tomb of the Emperor Akbar, at Secundra, Near Agra’, a similar English encampment is visible in the foreground with the monument in the back. Within ’picturesque’ representation the presence of the English colonizer was being increasingly fore-grounded. This probably pre-empts a more systemic and targeted intervention with the site which would be undertaken during the Cunningham era. In the process, the image of the ruin itself underwent several aesthetic mediations and became an integral part of the formation of an archive geared toward producing a discursive framework for historicizing the country’s ruins and thereby reading its past. In the next section we will be closely looking at how Gaur enters this process of archiving and emerges as a mapped site.

B. The Transition to ‘Monument’: The Cunningham Era

In this section, I will be looking at Gaur’s location vis-à-vis a major discursive shift from the ‘picturesque’ to the ‘scientific’ which occurs within colonial Indian archaeology over the mid and late nineteenth century. The shift from trade to Empire required the rhetoric of a civilizing imperative. The ‘colony’ needed to be assigned a history which would service the Empire. It is in this light that we need to map the shift from exotic ‘ruin’ to knowable ‘monument’; i.e., from an earlier moment of encounter with a ‘picturesque’ site to a more systematized and consolidated effort of custodianship. The latter involved a rigorous process of systematic documentation, mapping, dating and creating an inventory. The ‘monument’ emerged as a discursive category which could be assigned a history that would in turn service the imperative of Empire. It was with this objective in mind that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) was formed in 1861 with Alexander Cunningham as its first director. Pitched against this backdrop, the case

20 Tapati Guha-Thakurta, in her essay ‘The Monument as Image: The Compulsion of Visual Representation in Colonial India’, discusses how the ‘monument’ throughout the 18th and 19th century was the product of a series of archaeological and historical mediations that radically recast the value and meaning of architectural remains of the past. She writes, ‘Its transference into and dissemination as image was an integral part of the same process. For, in becoming a “monument”, a structure also had to be rendered into an effective and replicable copy for a variety of official, scholarly, and public uses.’ For a detailed discussion of Guha-Thakurta’s argument, see Traces of India: Photography, Architecture, and the Politics of Representation, 1850-1900, ed. Maria Antonella Pelizzari, New Haven: Yale Centre for British Art, 2003, 108-139.

21 In her book Monumental Matters, Santhi Kavuri-Bauer explores how a change in power relations, owing to the shift from trade to Empire, effectuated a change in the spatial ordering of monuments. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre’s notion of ‘space’, Bauer explores how the ‘monumentality’ of the Mughal monument was compromised in favour of a proto-scientific discourse of systematized survey and mapping instituted by Cunningham and after him, James Burgess. This brought about a transformation— from ‘monument’ as a site of ‘lived realities’ to ‘monument’ as the ‘dead space’ of ‘pure archaeology’. Bauer also addresses the internal shifts within the ASI which came about with Lord
of Gaur becomes an interesting one. Within this earliest archive of production/dissemination as ‘monument’, Gaur emerges as a documented site, but, as we shall see, not one over which there is a huge investment.

It was with the foundation of the ASI and the advent of Alexander Cunningham and his assistance, Joseph David Beglar that we witness a more rigorous attempt at documentation and conservation projects in situ. Between the 1850s and 1900s, the early years of its foundation, the ASI undertook extensive surveys of the colony’s ruins, which was documented through detailed photographs of each of these sites. Cunningham and his team surveyed the ruins of Eastern India in the 1870s and the photographs of Gaur and Pandua taken by Beglar during this survey can be found in the ‘India Museum Series’. These photographs are prints from glass and calotype negatives and are arranged in 46 volumes, the negatives listed by T. Bloch. Volumes 2 and 3 include 29 photographs of Gaur by Beglar. (figure 8) The advent of the camera facilitated a photographic documentation of these sites. Although not completely devoid of the aesthetics of the ‘picturesque’, these photographs nevertheless served to produce an institutional structure vis-à-vis which a jurisdiction over the monument could be claimed. It is within such a jurisdiction that figures like Cunningham and Beglar need to be located.


The ‘monument’ became a central point of reference in the process of constructing a history by inventing a collective past around it. Within colonial history writing, ‘East’ and ‘West’ emerged as two different conceptual categories, where the process of differentiating between the ‘West’ and the ‘East’ began to feed into the attempt of writing a progressivist universal history of humanity which sought to assimilate all civilizations within an ascending teleology culminating in the achievements of the capitalist nation-states of Western Europe. It is such an impulse which characterized the works of someone like James Fergusson (1808-1886) whose pioneering act of surveying and documenting Indian architecture was published as the *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (1876). Fergusson came up with a theory of the history of Indian architecture which effortlessly fed into a universalist teleological paradigm that had the West as its defining telos of reference. According to Fergusson, Buddhist-Gandhara architecture, with a certain ‘Classical’ simplicity and a purity of form, which drew a direct lineage from ancient Greece, represented the highest stage of aesthetic excellence in Indian art. All subsequent architecture until the coming of Islam in Fergusson is designated as ‘Hindu’ and is defined by him as the exact opposite of the Buddhist-Gandhara form, having been ‘corrupted’ by ‘Brahminical’ influences. The excessively ‘ornate’ surface decorations, according to Fergusson, are based upon a ‘false’ premise of design. What Fergusson forwards is a theory of a progressive decline, symbolic itself of a decaying civilization, as opposed to the nation-states of Western Europe wherein he reads a progressive ascendency of the architectural form. Within this narrative of progressive degeneration a break is provided by Islamicate architecture, which Fergusson labels ‘Indo-Saracen’, culminating in the ‘grand Mughal’ architecture epitomized by the Taj Mahal.

Within such a teleologically unfolding historiography, how can we locate the architecture of Gaur? Fergusson, although he never himself visited Gaur, in

---

22 Monica Juneja, for instance, looks at how within such a process of construction of history by inventing a collective past, architecture came to be intricately linked with notions of heritage and identity. Through this process, buildings began to acquire a past created/invented by the colonial historian, a past created through narratives of origin, construction, symbolic value and usage. See Monica Juneja, ‘Introduction’, *Architecture in Medieval India: Forms, Contexts, Histories*, ed. Monica Juneja, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001, 6-11.

23 It needs to be mentioned here that Fergusson was in many ways echoing an assumption inherent within colonial historiography which drew upon Grecian models of architecture as representing an epitome of aesthetic excellence. A counter to this perspective is offered by William Hodges in *A Dissertation on the Prototypes of Architecture*, published as an individual pamphlet in 1787, and later included as part of his larger *Travels in India* (1794). In Hodges’s view, all complex or sophisticated architecture represents a gradual development from a simple and more primitive ‘original’ model. Whereas Grecian architecture, according to him, develops from a rustic hut, Indian architecture draws on the prototype of the cave. He, likewise, offers different prototypes for Egyptian, Moorish and Gothic architecture. Although chronologically prior to Fergusson, Hodges’s view of architecture presents a more pluralistic and non-teleological model that does not use Grecian architecture as an epitome. For a more detailed discussion on Hodges, see G.H.R. Tillotson, ‘The Indian Travels of William Hodges’, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, third series, vol. 2. 3, London: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 377-398, accessed 20 March, 2013 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25182573>.
Parjanya Sen  Gaur as ‘Monument’: the making of an archive and tropes of memorializing

discussing the category and examples of ‘Indo-Saracenic’ architecture mentions the case of Bengal. Fergusson writes:

The country is practically without stone, or any suitable material for forming either pillars or beams. Having nothing but brick, it was almost of necessity that they employed arches everywhere, and in every building that had any pretensions to permanency. The Bengal style being, however, the only one wholly of brick in India Proper, has a local individuality of its own, which is curious and interesting, though, from the nature of the material, deficient in many of the higher qualities of art which characterise the buildings constructed with larger and better materials...

The Bengalis, taking advantage of the elasticity of the bambu, universally employ in their dwellings a curvilinear form of roof, which has become so familiar to their eyes, that they consider it beautiful. It is so in fact when bambu and thatch are the materials employed, but when translated into stone or brick architecture, its taste is more questionable.24

He almost hastily adds: ‘There is, however, so much that is conventional in architecture, and beauty depends to such an extent on association, that strangers are hardly fair judges in a case of this sort.”25 A similar observation on aesthetics is present in Cunningham’s description of the monuments of Gaur. In describing the Lattan Masjid, Cunningham writes:

Franklin has given an enthusiastic description of the beauty of this mosque, which he thinks is not surpassed for ‘elegance of style, lightness of construction, or tasteful decoration, in any part of Upper Hindustan’. I freely admit that the general appearance of the building is decidedly pleasing, but I dispute the lightness of construction, and deny altogether the tastefulness of the decoration. Lightness of construction is just the point in which the Muhammadan architecture of Bengal fails.26

Once again, Cunningham echoes a similar view when describing the Adina Masjid in Pandua, ‘The Great Adina Mosque of Hazrat Pandua is looked upon by the Bengalis as one of the wonders of the world. But bigness is not grandeur, and the Adina Masjid is little better than a gigantic barn.”27

With Fergusson’s comment on aesthetics and Cunningham’s reductive take on Gaur’s architecture, let me return to the argument with which I began this section; that Gaur, despite becoming a documented site, recedes into the periphery, both within architectural scholarship as well as within archaeological jurisdiction.

There seems to be a dwindling in the intensity of concern with the monument of medieval Bengal, as we can perceive in Cunningham’s invocation of Francklin’s opinion of the Lattan Masjid, only to immediately refute it.

In the case of Gaur, one of the primary factors behind its becoming a peripheral site, as can be clearly read from Fergusson, is an obvious hierarchy built into the very process of rendering the ‘monument’ as a discursive category, i.e., the hierarchization of stone over brick. Elizabeth Lambourne, in her essay which looks at Islamicate architectural practices in Gujarat, posits the idea that brick and/or timber constituted the architectural norm in Gujarat, with occasional use of hardwood brought in from South India by sea. According to Lambourne, stone architecture, such as the sites at Bhadresvar, only constituted a micro tradition. Lambourne writes, ‘The Islamic architectures of South Asia cannot be artificially cut off from the indigenous traditions within which they grew up.’

Gaur presents a similar case, where the monuments draw upon earlier building traditions in brick and terracotta. When archaeology as discipline is instituted in India, these local/regional traditions are undermined by a colonial template which uses Classical Greece as its primary point of reference, thereby establishing a hierarchy which dictates which building material (stone/brick) and form of architecture gets precedence in terms of intervention/preservation. The local traditions are thus displaced by an over-determining centralized discipline of archaeology as practised by the ASI in the earlier years post its inception in 1861. Pitched against this, Gaur, owing both to its geographical remoteness as well as the material deployed for building, is inevitably undermined and loses its significance as ‘monument’. Also, owing to Fergusson’s teleological structuring of the history of Indian architecture (civilization) vis-à-vis a privileging of the Buddhist past and a simultaneous undermining of the ‘Hindu’ past, Bengal dwindles in importance as it lacks any visual trace of its pre-Islamic Buddhist past.


29 David McCutchion, for instance, has explored how the Bengal mosque can be seen as a ‘synthesis’ of Persianate architectural forms and existing local traditions, developing from the model of the ‘ekbangla’ or ‘do-chala’ hut, which McCutchion terms as ‘Bengal’s most distinctive contribution to temple architecture.’ See David J. McCutchion, *Late Mediaeval Temples of Bengal: Origins and Classification*, Kolkata: The Asiatic Society, 1972. Also, Perween Hassan’s book *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh* presents an interesting case study of how the mosque of medieval Bengal draws upon various earlier forms of architecture, particularly Buddhist and Jain architecture, some of which survive today in present-day Burma. See Perween Hassan, *Sultans and Mosques: The Early Muslim Architecture of Bangladesh*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2007.

30 It needs to be mentioned in this context that three Buddhist viharas which have been excavated in greater Bengal were unknown to Fergusson. These three sites are located respectively in Paharpur in the Rajshahi District in present day Bangladesh, at Jagibnapur near Malda, and the recently excavated site at Moghol Mari near Dantan in Midnapur, West Bengal.
C. Tropes of Memorializing and the Location of the ‘Native’ Scholar

The establishment of the discipline of colonial archaeology and the foregrounding of the figure of the scientific archaeologist, such as Alexander Cunningham, eventually led to the emergence of a variety of subject positions one of which was that of the ‘native’ scholar who had to negotiate the tricky terrain of colonial modernity while simultaneously claiming for himself an affiliation with a nationalist past. None of these subject-positions, however, were working in contradistinction to Enlightenment modernity. Also, during the Curzonian phase, the ASI underwent a series of shifts as it gradually began to make room for the ‘native’ scholar. Abid Ali, in many ways, comes off as the ‘native’ scholar located within the ambit of colonial archaeology whose access to the site is itself enabled by the colonial establishment, which however, as we will examine, simultaneously also thwart his claims of scholarship.

Khan Sahib Abid Ali Khan’s book, Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua was published, after considerable revision, with a ‘Foreword’ by H.E. Stapleton, in 1930. In 1902-03, working as an employee under the British government, i.e., as a ministerial officer serving in the Public Works Department and entrusted with the task of restoration of the monuments of Gaur, Abid Ali had written a draft edition of the book on the occasion of the then Viceroy, Lord Curzon’s visit to Gaur. This booklet was eventually revised and given the shape of a Memoir. Abid Ali, by servicing the colonial government, ascended the social ladder and rose in rank. As he states in his autobiography, quoted in the ‘Foreword’ by H.E. Stapleton to Abid Ali’s book, ‘In recognition of my services, Government was pleased to confer upon me the title of ‘Khan Sahib’ in the year 1917.’ It is also no small coincidence that Abid Ali was the first person of his village, Arhidanga, and also of his family, to know English. His autobiography tells us that Abid Ali and his brother were the first ‘Muhammadans’ of the district to receive English education, an initiative taken by his father, Haji Turab Khan of Arhidanga— ‘In my boyhood I was educated in the vernacular languages in the village school and afterwards acquired English education in the Zilla school at Malda and in the Calcutta Madrasah.’ However, we also need to be mindful of the slips within this process of subject formation. Abid Ali, despite his location as the ‘native’ scholar co-opted by Western pedagogy, nevertheless attempts to articulate a position which is autonomous of Western intervention.

31 Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her essay ‘Interlocuting Texts and Monuments: The Coming of Age of the “Native” Scholar’ in her book Monuments, Objects, Histories, theorizes the various subject positions engendered by colonial archaeology. Discussing the figures of Ram Raz and Rajendralal Mitra, Guha-Thakurta clearly delineates these subject-positions and shows how both emerged as products of a disciplinary field founded by Western scholarship. In a subsequent essay ‘Between the Nation and the Region: The Locations of a Bengali Archaeologist’, she shows how the figure of Rakhaldas Banerjee is ‘interpolated by a newly defined “Bengali” self-identity that sought out its own spheres of local enterprise and saw in archaeology an ideal means of invoking the “Bengali” nation and its once-glorious past.’ For a detailed discussion, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Monuments, Objects, Histories, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2004, 85-139.

A parallel to Abid Ali’s *Memoirs* may be found in Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s *Asar-as-Sanadid* (‘Vestiges of the Past’). The book is a detailed description of the monuments of Delhi. Sayyid Ahmad Khan was a historian and astronomer and is better known as one of the first reformist intellectuals of Delhi. Interestingly, the book has two editions, both of which differ significantly in their structure and historiographical location. The first edition of *Asar-as-Sanadid*, published in 1847, is written in the traditional mould of Indo-Muslim histories in which, as Monica Juneja notes, ‘poetry, panegyric and moral and political instruction were fused, and the cultural diversity of Hindustan lavishly praised.’ This edition was dedicated to Sir Thomas Metcalfe, the first president of the Archaeological Society of Delhi founded in 1847, and is preceded by a eulogy in Persian verse (taqriz) of the author and his work by Nawab Ziya ud-din, one of the earliest ‘native’ members of the Archaeological Society of Delhi. This edition, Juneja writes, ‘is written in a highly ornate, flowery Persianized Urdu, richly interspersed with Persian verse, and wherein even the prose rhymes.’

The second edition, published a good seven years later in 1854, followed Ahmad Khan’s initiation in 1852, as ‘Native Honorary Member’ of the Archaeological Society of Delhi. In 1850, the Society actively sought the collaboration of Indian scholars who would be selectively admitted into its ranks. The second edition of *Asar-as-Sanadid* consciously seeks to locate itself within a different historiographic tradition, that promoted by the Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Archaeological Society of Delhi. Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself writes that the second edition is infinitely superior to the earlier one, and rectifies many of the mistakes of the earlier edition. The second edition attempts to position the monuments of Delhi within a chronological order, and thus arranges them in accordance with their ascribed year of construction.

Whereas in the case of *Asar-as-Sanadid*, Sayyid Ahmad Khan himself repositions the text within a different historiographic tradition, the print history of Abid Ali’s book presents a slightly different picture. While the initial draft edition was written on the occasion of Lord Curzon’s visit in 1902 and presented to the Viceroy by the author, for which he received a reward of Rs 100, it was not until 1925 that a manuscript of the book was submitted for approval, after undergoing significant revisions and considerable enlargement in size with many illustrations. On November 14, 1926 Abid Ali himself died, and at the end of the year 1928 further discussions ensued as to the need for still more revision before the book could see the light of the printing press. It was then that H.E. Stapleton, the-then Director of Public Instruction of Bengal, was entrusted with the task of reviewing and editing the manuscript and writing a ‘Foreword’ to it. Stapleton takes the readers through this chequered history of the book’s publication in his ‘Foreword’. He writes:

I utilized the opportunity of another visit to Maldah early in 1929 to check the author’s statements as far as possible in situ: but examination of the typed manuscript showed that much further revision of the book was necessary, particularly in the direction of checking the correctness of the

---

author’s historical references, and in removing unnecessary repetitions. The work has since then undergone at least three revisions, twice in typescript and once in galley proof, and most of the resulting book is in consequence very different from the form in which it was submitted to the Government in 1925.35

Stapleton then explains in detail the changes made to the manuscript edition, noting that the section on Pandua as well as the last chapter had to be re-modelled and expanded, as in both cases fresh ‘facts’ had come to light since the author’s death and that the first two chapters also underwent considerable changes. Stapleton also adds, ‘The original frame-work of the book has however been preserved intact, as, short of rewriting, it was impossible to make any alteration in this respect.’36

The case of Abid Ali’s Memoirs is visibly different from that of Asar-as-Sanadid although the similarities in the process of revision are more than telling. In the case of Abid Ali’s book, a colonial intervention becomes necessary, even mandatory, before the manuscript is considered ‘worthy’ of the printing press. In re-inscribing the book, there is a veritable shift which occurs in its historiographic position. To refer to one example, the addition of an expanded Bibliography as well as a Topographical Bibliography and the obsession with ‘facts’ and geographical accuracy are themselves characteristic of a Rankean dialectic of history writing. What is even more interesting in the case of Memoirs is that the ‘dead author’ himself becomes a non-actant in the process of revision of the work, quite unlike Sayyid Ahmad Khan, who himself sought to re-position his book within a Westernized historiographic tradition. All this, in turn, becomes symptomatic of the larger process of co-optation of the ‘native’ scholar within a form of Westernized scholarship that laid a determining claim to the colony’s ruins/history.

In the ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ of Asar-as-Sanadid, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, in a manner similar to Abid Ali, seeks to articulate his own position as author and stake a claim on the monuments of Delhi. He writes:

O God! Just as our Prophet, Muhammad Mustafa, may peace be upon him, has shown mercy on the condition of us sinners, in the like manner but many more times, grant Your mercy on him, his progeny and his followers, Amen! After this, Saiyid Ahmad Khan, son of Saiyid Muhammad Muttaqi Khan Bahadur, grandson of Jawad ud Daula Jawad ‘Ali Khan Bahadur and maternal grandson of Nawab Dabir ud Daula Amin al Mulk Khwaja Farid ud Din Ahmad Khan Bahadur Muslah Jang, humbly states that in AH 1263, corresponding to AD 1846, I had written a book on the monuments of Delhi and published it.37

Ahmad Khan is here claiming for himself, through an Islamic family lineage and an invocation to the prophet Muhammad, a certain privileged status as author of the monuments of Delhi. By extension, he is simultaneously memorializing the monument in terms of an Islamic past/identity. Abid Ali’s claim goes a step further. He claims a direct lineage to the family of the Pathan rulers who ruled Gaur, and by extension, claims a direct familial lineage to the site. The two claims seem to mark an interesting shift from an objective enquiry into a teleologically fashioned past as was characteristic of colonial historiography. Instead, they attempt to memorialize the monument through the affective claim of the familial.

Discursively embedded within Western scholarship and yet marking a shift from it by foregrounding the familial as also by occasionally slipping into earlier, more ‘traditional’, forms of history writing, the form of the Memoirs itself emerged as a historiographic genre through which the medieval monument was memorialized. According to Monica Juneja, during this period a number of Indian scholars of Indology, Sanskrit and Persian were associated with the Archaeological Survey and its research projects and were actively engaged in the writing of such archaeological Memoirs. Juneja discusses some of these Memoirs at length, particularly the series entitled Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, authored by Zafar Hasan, of which the one dealing with the Nizamuddin complex is the most well known.38 Zafar Hasan’s Memoirs drew upon Fergusson’s repertoire of information as also on the latter’s structural characterisation of buildings. Abid Ali’s Memoirs seems to similarly rely on Cunningham’s structural descriptions of the buildings of Gaur. Also, like Zafar Hasan, Abid Ali’s Memoirs provides a transcription and translation of the Arabic and Persian inscriptions on the monuments, something which is not present in either Fergusson or Cunningham.

However, one crucial difference needs to be highlighted. Unlike the Memoirs of Zafar Hasan and others in the series, which were titled ‘Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India’, Abid Ali’s Memoirs is not a direct offshoot of the ASI, but a subjective response to a historical site, which can only articulate itself through the paradigm of Western scholarship. What we witness here, undoubtedly, is the emergence of a new genre, the Memoirs, with its own characteristic tropes of memorializing. The development of this genre may be seen as effectuated by the co-optation of the ‘native’ scholar by Western scholarship.

It might be interesting here to off-set Abid Ali’s subject position with a parallel claim on Gaur, emerging in the early years of the century out of a metropolitan Bengali position. In this context, the figure of Rajanikanta Chakraborty, Abid Ali’s friend and contemporary, presents an interesting contrast, both in terms of location and subject position. Chakraborty not only operates from a location outside the ambit of colonial archaeology but also comfortably straddles the spectrums of both colonial and vernacular scholarship. Inhabiting the subject position of the middle-class Bengali intellectual, his claim on Gaur is symptomatic of a powerful nationalist position which sought to recuperate the pre-Islamic past of

Gaur and locate it within a nationalist and/or regional trope of reading the country’s history.

A resident of English Bazaar in Malda and a Sanskrit teacher of the Malda Zilla School, Chakraborty was a good friend of Abid Ali and they together studied and surveyed the site, as mentioned by the latter in the ‘Preface’ to Memoirs of Gaur and Pandua. Abid Ali writes in his ‘Preface’ that he and ‘Babu’ Rajanikanta Chakraborty would often tour the ruins together. Abid Ali also acknowledges his indebtedness to ‘Babu’ Rajanikanta Chakraborty’s book Gourer Itihas which he says he has freely quoted from, in his own Memoirs.

Chakraborty, while he attempts to trace a socio-political history of Gaur from its pre-Islamic past to the advent of the Pathans through the Sultanate era, nevertheless remains obsessed with the search for a lost ‘origin’ of the Bengali civilization. In his book, Gourer Itihas, first published in 1907 by Rangapur Sahitya Parishad, he writes, that prior to the advent of the Islamic rule in Bengal, trade and commerce in Eastern India was entirely dominated by the Bengalis. He also goes on to mention how the Bengalis were the ones who preached Buddhism in the Eastern countries, citing proto-historical/mythical references such as the stories that the Dalai Lama was a Bengali prince in his earlier birth and the Tashi Lama too was an individual from Bengal named Abhaykar Gupta in his previous birth.

His book is clearly divided into two parts, the second dealing with the period after the advent of Islam and the first attempting to recuperate the pre-Islamic history of Gaur. In the ‘Preface’ to the second part of the book, Chakraborty writes, ‘The Mussalman monarchs would often persecute their subjects. This is a historical truth. If we overlook it, we will be dishonouring the truth.’ He, however, immediately goes on to add ‘Because of certain religious practices in a bygone era, we should not harbour hatred towards the Mussalmans today. We have seen examples of such forms of persecution throughout the world in various phases of history, whether it be the persecution of the Protestants by the Roman Catholics or the persecution of Buddhists by the Hindu monarchs.’ A witness to the revolutionary nationalisms which followed the Partition of 1905, Chakraborty’s approach seems to prefigure a certain form of syncretism or secular nationalism which would soon become the overriding paradigm of much of the scholarship on medieval history.

Also, Chakraborty is not altogether indifferent to the visual traces of history, as strewn within the monumental remains of Gaur and Pandua. There is a certain investment in his book in the monuments of Gaur, using them as one of the entry points into the social history of the site. Yet, although his historical approach can be seen as anticipating a certain trope of syncretism, he never really interrogates medieval Islamicate architecture’s use of recycled materials as a syncretic architectural form. Rather, he reads the monuments as products of Islamic vandalism whereby earlier Hindu structures were demolished and the stone materials used for construction of mosques. He thus writes:

---


40 Rajanikanta Chakraborty, Gourer Itihas, Kolkata: Dey’s Publishing House, 1999, 137.

41 Rajanikanta Chakraborty, Gourer Itihas, 113.
Often, when a slab of stone loosens and falls off, one can witness the sculpted icons of various Hindu gods and goddesses on the opposite surface. In many places, the icons have been chiselled out. If this couldn’t be achieved, the stone was placed with the icon facing inwards.\textsuperscript{42}

It needs to be mentioned here that Chakraborty’s reading of the medieval monument as a product of undifferentiated Islamic vandalism needs to be located within a larger trend within colonial historiography, nationalist history writing, and art historical writings of the period, and also within popular imagination.\textsuperscript{43}

What Chakraborty, however, does manage to do, and quite uniquely, is to provide a written account of some the ways in which a few of the monuments of Gaur have been memorialized through myth. Dr. Malaysankar Bhattacharyya, in his ‘Introduction’ to the 1999 edition of the book, mentions that Chakraborty was greatly interested in oral histories and travelled throughout Malda collecting them\textsuperscript{44}. At the end of Chakraborty’s socio-political history of Gaur, in the last chapter of his book, the material ruins are described in detail, some of them accompanied by short accounts of the myths which grew around them.\textsuperscript{45} Owing to his regular visits to the site, as already mentioned above, with his friend Abid Ali, Chakraborty was far more acquainted with these material ruins. In fact, Abid Ali is acknowledged in the ‘Preface’ to the second part of Chakraborty’s book. Although Rajanikanta Chakraborty and Abid Ali seem to inhabit two very different subject positions in terms of their claims to the monuments of Gaur, their texts seem to be in conversation with each other. I would argue that it is in fact the imperative of this very dialogue between the two texts that prevents Chakraborty’s \textit{Gourer Itihas} from spilling over into an aggressively-argued Hindu nationalist position.

In this essay, I have thus tried to look at the various ways in which Gaur has been archived and enters into institutionalized custody, from earlier histories of exploration and visual documentation to a more systematized colonial intervention. I have also tried to interrogate the position of the ‘native’ scholar through whom certain tropes of memorializing the site emerges. We find a figure like Abid Ali locked in a curious double bind, caught between his position within colonial historiography and his parallel affective claim on the site on the basis of family, ancestry and religion. Abid Ali’s account also becomes part of a reclaimed historical

\textsuperscript{42} Rajanikanta Chakraborty, \textit{Gourer Itihas}, 113.
\textsuperscript{43} For a long time, such a trend remained the determining trope of reading the medieval monument. It is only much later, in the 1980s and 1990s that art historical scholarship attempted to move beyond this trope and read the medieval monument not as the product of an undifferentiated Islamic iconophobia but rather as a newly emergent architectural form with its own set of styles and idioms of re-appropriation. Architectural historians such as Finbarr Barry-Flood have brought fresh light to the ways in which the medieval and Mughal monuments of India can be read. For a detailed discussion of Barry-Flood’s argument, see Finbarr Barry-Flood, \textit{Objects of Translation: Material Culture and Medieval ‘Hindu-Muslim’ Encounter}, New Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2009.
\textsuperscript{45} Chakraborty, \textit{Gourer Itihas}, 316-36.
archive on Gaur – a definitive archive that would be continually expanded and
drawn upon by every historian writing on the site. By contrast, Chakraborty’s book,
while it remains discursively embedded within a search for Gaur’s lost pre-Islamic
‘origins’, establishes his position as perhaps the first local historian of the site. His
professional position- that of a school teacher in Malda, gives him a contrasting local
profile within the larger worlds of colonial and nationalist scholarship with which
he worked.

Parjanya Sen is a Doctoral Fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences,
Calcutta (CSSSC). Working under the supervision of Professor Tapati Guha-
Thakurta, his research looks at the cultural biography of the medieval Islamicate
monuments of Eastern India and Bangladesh, how these are discursively shaped by
ideologies of state and Empire, and how they are variously memorialized through
myth, literature and oral histories. This paper is part of his dissertation entitled
‘Voices of Monuments: Narratives of Gaur and Pandua’ written for the M.Phil in
Social Sciences program, 2010-12, of the CSSSC.

parjanyasen@gmail.com