

SOME NOTES ON THE INTRODUCTION OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN NEPAL

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Bourne & Sheperd British Photography Company was established at Park Street, Calcutta in the 1850s. Some people from this company (maybe Bourne & Sheperd themselves) visited Nepal during Jung Bahadur Rana's time in the 1860s. They photographed Jung Bahadur and his family, and went to different hills and mountains along with numerous porters to take photos. All the equipment required for negative processing was taken to the field since the negative plates had to be processed right after taking the photo. It is said that over 200 photos were taken from the altitude of 15000 feet. They used to visit Nepal from time to time. They were invited for wedding and hunting photography. They also visited Kathmandu to record the damage caused by the 1935 earthquake. This photography company still exists in Bombay.

Dambar Samsheer Rana is considered to be the first photographer among the Nepalese, but it is not known yet where and from whom he learned photography. He was succeeded by his son Shamar Samsheer, who learned from his father. Shamar was very well-known in Nepal, and used to work for the palaces. He had many people to help him. Negative glass plate was coated with silver nitrate in the dark room. He had some Citrakar employees who did oil painting on the image of the negative reflected on the canvas through enlarger-projection. Sometimes water painting also was done. Numerous paintings were made by this technique.

The normal size of negative at that time was the post card although occasionally 10/12 inches was used. As the negatives were big enough, contact prints were very commonly made on the ready made bromide-paper. As mentioned above, silver nitrate coating was done by themselves on the glass plate for negatives.

The younger brother of Shamar Samsheer, Bal Krishna Samsheer, was also a very good photographer as well as a poet, writer, dramatist, painter...

The employees of Shamar Samsheer learned photography with him. Among them, one may cite : Bharat Pradhan from Asan, Narayan Prasad Joshi and his father, Dirgha Man Chitrakar, and Purna Man Chitrakar.

As photography equipment was very heavy, 2-3 persons were required to carry it from one place to another. Some times the assistants borrowed the equipment from the Rana photographer -especially the camera, lens and tripod- to photograph their family and friends, because they could not afford the camera. The camera was lent to them just for the day.

Bharat Pradhan, Asan

Bharat Pradhan is one of the oldest photographers, other than the Ranas. He learned photography with Dambar Samsheer about 100 years ago. Later he ope-

ned a studio, named "Bharat studio". Before that he used to borrow a camera from Dambar Samsheer to capture his friends, relatives and customers, and immediately after had to return it.

The rest of the work, such as the processing, was done at his home. By taking photos of his customers, he earned some money.

At that time contact print was done because the glass-plate negative itself was big enough. The negative was exposed to sun light to make a print. For enlargement sun light was also used. But Bharat Pradhan did not have even a watch to control the time of exposure, so he used to look at the clock-tower visible from his house or to count his breathings. Silver nitrate coating on the glass plate was done at night in the dark-room. Before silver-nitrate coating, silver chloride and gold chloride were also used for coating on the glass plate, according to the grand-son of Bharat Pradhan.

The assistants of Dambar Samsheer were not allowed to keep the camera at their home overnight. At any cost they had to return it before it got dark. Some had dark-rooms at home, others developed in the Rana's dark room after getting permission.

Fire crackers were used if one had to take photo at night since there was no flash and not even electricity. To balance the light and shade outdoors, a sheet of white cloth was used while exposing the negative.

Photographic activity was not enough to support a family and the first photographers had to earn money elsewhere. Bharat Pradhan, for instance, had a timber business and possessed some land from which he got rice.

The photographic equipment at the time of Bharat Pradhan, according to his grand son, came from the following places :

- the camera-lens was German and body was British, later Nepalese body as well.
- paper (Bromide paper)- Selo English Bromide paper, Ilford English Bromide paper, Kodak American Bromide paper, Agfa German Bromide paper.
- chemicals - mostly English.
- enlarger lens and condenser - German and English
- trays and tools - English
- enlarger's body and camera's body - Sometimes made by local carpenters.

Like at that time, ready-made photography chemicals were not available to buy in the market. They had to weight the chemicals and mix them to make chemicals ready for photo-processing.

Chakra Bahadur Kayasta

Chakra Bahadur Kayasta is one of pioneer photographers among the public photographers. It is not yet known from whom he learned photography. Some of his grand sons said that probably he learned photography first from Dambar Samsheer's palace. He was a photographer for the royal palace during the time of Prithvi Bir Bikram Shah Deva, the father of Tribhuwan.

Chakra Bahadur was sent to Calcutta to learn photography.

The descendants of Chakra Bahadur have been involved in photography and now it is the 3rd and 4th generation. His sons and nephews learned the art with him, as well as Narayan Prasad Joshi. The latter fell in love with a widow of Kayasta's family although he already had two wives at home and could not fulfil his project because of them.

It is said that Kayasta's photographers were very skilled at making wooden enlargers and camera boxes in which the lens was fitted in one side. At the back of the box two big holes were made. This camera was fitted with a wooden tripod. The whole camera was covered with a thick black cloth. The lens was capped all the time. To take the photo the cap of the lens is taken out for some seconds according to brightness of outdoor light. The bromide paper which has been put inside the camera box is exposed. After this, through the side holes at the back of the camera, hands are inserted for developing and fixing (processing) the exposed bromide paper negative inside the camera box. After negative processing positive processing starts. After 30 minutes or so the positive is ready to be taken out in the light. The photo made by this technique is very cheap since it is a paper negative.

These photographers went to villages with their camera since this cheap technique was affordable for the people. But some did not like having their photo taken, believing that it shortened the life.

Chitrakars painters and photographers :

Chitrakars were first employed by the Rana photographer for painting. The image exposed on a glass plate negative was projected onto canvas or bromide paper through enlarger. The painter oil painted or water coloured on the projected image - on the canvas or bromide paper. The projected images were very big, sometimes life size. It was not difficult for them to paint. The paintings of the Ranas were thus made by the Chitrakars.

Progressively the Chitrakars learned photography. Among them, one may cite : Dirgha Man Chitrakar, Ambar Man Chitrakar, Rat Bahadur Chitrakar, Purna Man Chitrakar, Chaitya Man Chitrakar, Yam Bahadur Chitrakar.

Among the above Chitrakars Dirgha Man and Purna Man were very renowned painters. They learned photography from Rana photographers. Dirgha Man worked as photographer and painter for Chandra Samsher and went with him to England as his photographer. Dirgha Man's father, Bhaju Man Chitrakar, went with Jung Bahadur to England as his painter, and sketched and painted different views of London (information : Kiran Chitrakar, Dirgha's grand son).

Purna Man used to work for Chet Shamsher. Dirgha Man and Purna Man started commercial photography along with modern oil painting, while continuing traditional paintings as well.

Dhan Chitrakar was renowned for his art of colouring black and white photos. Retouching was done to remove the scratches from the negative and positive and to lighten the faces of the people, who did not like dark appearances.

Narayan Prasad Joshi

Raj Man Joshi was an employee in the palace of Dambar Samsher Rana. He was not employed for photography work, but was very much interested in it and sometimes helped the Ranas. He thus acquired some knowledge of the technique and took his son, Narayan Prasad to the palace so that he could learn it. Narayan pleased the Ranas because he was young, smart and handsome. He used to come to the palace everyday and learnt photography progressively by helping the photographers. At the same time, he learned the Tablas there. The father and son invested some money to import photographic goods from England : chemicals, bromide paper, silver nitrate coated glass plate negatives.

Narayan opened the "Snap Shot" studio in his house at Nar Devi Tol in 2003 V.S. There he used mostly Rolleiflex cameras and ready-made film was now available in the market.

Udas and Sakya photographers

Udas and Sakya photographers took photos both in Nepal and in Tibet. According to the information so far collected three Udas and one Sakya photographers were doing photography first in Tibet and then in Nepal: Purna Tamrakar, Tej Man Tamrakar (Yatkha Bahal), Singh Tuladhar (Khicapokhari) and Budhi Bir Sakya (Makhan Yalli). It is said that commercial photography in Tibet was first introduced by Udas photographers. They left Tibet and came back to Nepal during the Chinese occupation.