

INTRODUCTION

This is the second in a series of articles regarding 19th and early 20th century photographers whose images appeared on turn-of-the-century postcards. The first article, "Focus Japan", (TPA 12: May 1998), presented a general history of the beginning of photography, and it introduced early photographic processes such as the daguerreotype, calotype and wet collodion. This composition looks at the early history of photography in India, and specifically at the photographic studios and postcards of Darjeeling.



PHOTOGRAPHIC MASTERPIECES ON PICTURE POSTCARDS

DARJEELING

BY: SALLY A. FALL

Photography traces its popular and utilitarian beginnings to 1839 with the works of Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre (France) and William Henry Fox Talbot (England). Following an initial period of experimentation and commercial portraiture, 19th century photographers explored additional ways in which to put the new medium to work. The expanded uses of photography included identification, topographical and archaeological surveys, studies in anthropology and ethnology, journalism and tourism. Photographs for tourism purposes focused on landscapes, man-made structures, native people and their occupational and cultural activities.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN 19TH CENTURY INDIA

As a result of strong political and economic ties to Great Britain, the art/science of photography reached the Indian subcontinent with great speed. Tentatively embraced during the 1840s, the camera served a vast constituency of British and Indian photographers during the last half of the 19th century. Preeminent names include Samuel Bourne and Lala Deen Dayal, war/military photographers John McCosh, Felice Beato and John Burke, and architectural/archaeological photographers Dr. John Murray and Edmund David Lyon.

Several of the photographers mentioned in this article were active in neighboring Burma and other Asian countries.

In January of 1840, Thacker, Spink and Co. of Calcutta announced the availability of daguerreotype cameras, and during that decade a small number of commercial photographers advertised their services. A lithograph copied from an 1840 daguerreotype of the Sans Souci Theatre in Calcutta survives. It is thought that photography started slowly in India due to uncertainties related to photographic chemical supplies, climate extremes and a lack of experienced mentors.

By the 1850's, however, photography swept across India like a monsoon. The calotype and wet collodion processes replaced the daguerreotype, and eventually the albumen print of the collodion process gained greatest acceptance.

In 1854, the Photographic Society of Bombay was formed and by the following year its membership exceeded 250 people. In 1856, two more societies emerged, Bengal and Madras. While the majority of society members were British, nearly one-third of the members to the Photographic Society of Bengal were Bengalis. Studios were established by Indians and British alike. Even the maharajas were taking an interest.

The 1850s produced an explosion of photographers and photographic purposes. Government workers, military officers, and physicians were attracted to the medium. Norman Chevers, Principal of Calcutta Medical College, suggested that photography should be used throughout India in police matters. The science could be used to identify victims, preserve crime scenes for posterity and aid distant investigators with their work.

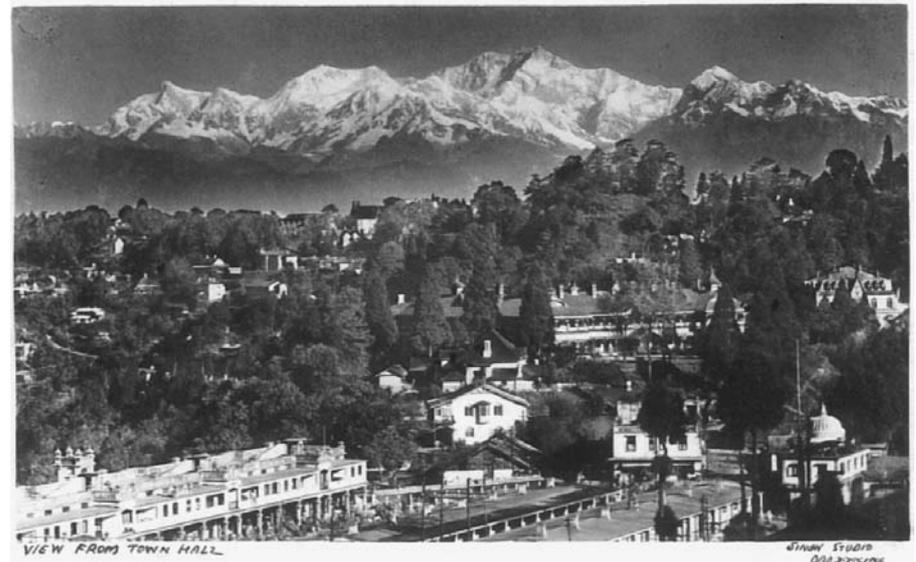
At the same time, the British government in India and more specifically the East India Company were involved in the ongoing Archaeological Survey of India. The employment of individual artists to produce hand-drawn illustrations of important buildings and monuments was proving costly and time-consuming. The camera was a quick and cost-effective alternative. By 1900 several thousand negatives of archaeological sites were listed by the India Office. Photographers of note included Captain Thomas Biggs, Dr. William Henry Pigou, William Henry Cornish, J.D. Beglar, Majors Henry Hardy Cole and Robert Gill.

Linnaeus Tripe, who photographed the architectural aspects of the Madras Presidency in the last half of the 1850s, represented yet another aspect of photography in India. In addition to recording archaeological aspects, the

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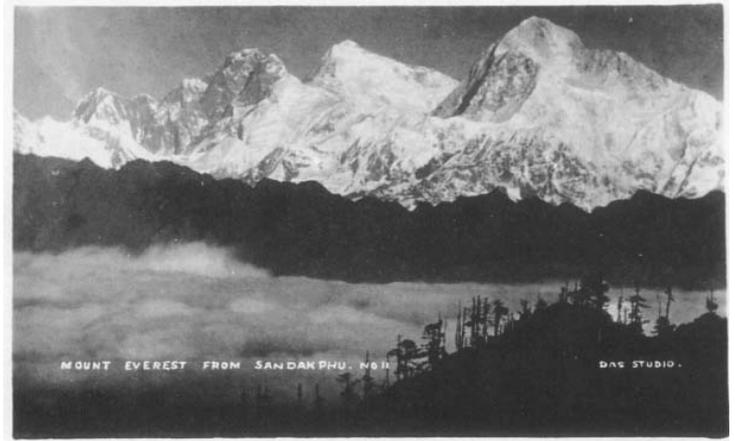
**ill 1:** "A Dealer in Curios, Darjeeling"  
This remarkable postcard image of a man holding the skull and horns of an Asian Water Buffalo is a real favorite of mine! Photographer unknown.



**ill 2:** "View from Town Hall"  
This photo card of Darjeeling with Kanchenjunga in the background is by Singh Studio.



**ill 3:**  
Gobindas Thakurdas / Das Studio card of a Tibetan with a prayer wheel.



**ill 4:**  
Das Studio card of "Mount Everest from Sandakphu. No 11".

government-sponsored Tripe also had instructions to photograph people.

During the 1860's and 70s, British governmental representatives showed increasing interest in the ethnology and anthropology of the subcontinent. The motivations were social as well as political. Not only did the British wish to establish a permanent record of vanishing tribes and customs, but they hoped to identify and understand healthy tribes and castes through photographic studies.

The eight-volume work, *The People of India* (1868-75), contains 468 tipped-in albumen prints of indigenous men and women. The photographs were taken by a variety of professionals and amateurs, civilian and military. The purpose of the publication was to describe, through word and picture, the physical and social attributes of various tribes and castes. It is illustrative of the ultimate in stereotyping people. One group might be described as dishonest and lawless; another as bold and patient. It was not the only work of its kind.

Also famous is the volume of "types" produced by the Calcutta firm of Johnston & Hoffmann during the 1880s. Commissioned by L.A. Waddell to do portraits of "types of

natives of Nepal, Sikhim and Tibet", it is thought that Johnston & Hoffmann produced the work in a Darjeeling studio. The resulting volume of portraits shows 30 people in full-face and in profile, with written descriptions of type, clothing, and whether or not the type and clothing were "typical". In other words, not everyone fit his or her mold exactly. Some were less typical than others. And yet those of us who collect postcards, be they of India or elsewhere, are only too aware of the typecasting that took place in photography.

#### POSTCARDS OF INDIA

According to Christopher Pinney in his book *Camera Indica*: "Phototype postcards first appeared in 1899 and were immediately hugely popular. In India many dozens of companies produced images, a large number of which depicted caste and occupational types. Firms such as Bourne and Shepherd in Calcutta and Higginbotham and Co. in Madras became famous for both their postcards and their general photographic work. Other leading postcard producers included Macropolo of Calcutta and Clifton and Co. in Bombay, and Indian studios such as Moorli Dhur & Sons in Ambala, Gobind and Oodey Ram of Jaipur and S. Mahadeo and Sons of Belgaum..."

In addition to the aforementioned, Thacker, Spink & Co., the early importers of daguerreotype cameras, were also involved in postcard production/distribution. I have a 20th century, artist-drawn view of Simla with "Thacker, Spink" on the back.

In India, as elsewhere, postcards were purchased by tourists and mailed to friends and family back home. In addition, India was home to a large British population involved in posts related to government, military and missionary work. These men and women also used postcards to correspond with the homeland.

While many of the cards offered landscape and monument views, others depicted native Indians in occupational roles. Pinney notes that the various types "are represented as functionaries of the Raj, symbols not of an imperilled primitivism but rather of a vital and adaptive labour force".

#### SPECIFICALLY DARJEELING

I have to plead guilty to my own passion for collecting postcards of people. Frequently, I find them in the dealers boxes marked "ethnic" and "costume". It would seem that not much has changed since the 1850s – and yet it has. Colonialism is fading and many of us hope that we are more enlightened in our attitudes towards others than were our European forebearers.

These days, my collection is widely focused on Asia, Africa and Oceania. My postcards of Darjeeling, India, and her people are some of my favorites (*ill 1*). As one of India's most famous hill stations, it was, and continues to be, a photographer's dream.

Located in the Himalaya, north of Calcutta, the Darjeeling tract was granted to the British by the Raja of Sikkim in 1836. Such a mountainous retreat (*ill 2*) provided relief from the oppressive heat of India and distance from diseases such as cholera. British-built hill stations featured Victorian architecture and attitudes, and provided an arena for social hobnobbing. Darjeeling, a celebrated tea-growing district, and nearby Tiger Hill have remarkable views of Kanchenjunga and Mt. Everest. (Editor's note: You'll see a variety of spellings for Kanchjunga in this article.)

#### DARJEELING'S PHOTOGRAPHERS AND POSTCARDS

Those of us who collect postcards of Darjeeling and its environs are familiar with the names Th. Paar, J. Burlington Smith and M. Sain of Burlington Studios, Das Studio (Gobindas Thakurdas), S. Singh and A. Hefferan. Additionally, the famous photographic firms



**ill 5:**  
"Devils-Masks Used at Ceremonies" is a "J. Burlington Smith, Photographer, Darjeeling" postcard, hand-dated June 14, 1919.

of Bourne & Shepherd and Johnston & Hoffmann were responsible for photographic images which became postcard images depicting the ethnicity of Darjeeling and its environs.

Thanks to D.D. Pradhan of Das Studio, Darjeeling, and John Falconer of the British Library, Oriental and India Office Collections, London, I am able to shed a bit of light on the history of Darjeeling's early photographers and studios. Sophie Gordon, Associate Curator of The Alkazi Collection of Photography in London, greatly assisted me in matching images with specific photographic studios. I owe a debt of gratitude to all who are acknowledged at the end of the article.

It's wonderful to find a local (Darjeeling) contact who has a special interest in the photographic history of his area, and such a person is D.D. Pradhan of Das Studio. According to Pradhan, his father opened the photographic studio in 1927, and prior to that the family business was buying and selling Nepalese and Tibetan curios. Some Das Studio postcards have "Gobindas Thakurdas" on the back (ill 3), and these were the names of his grandfather and father.

Pradhan writes: "Even then (1927) it was the tourist business that was the mainstay for these businesses in Darjeeling and seeing the big demand for postcards and large size views of the mountains (ill 4), he (my father) decided to change over to a photographic business. I still have many of his old large size plates (12" x 10") – but unfortunately not all of his smaller ones. We have moved our shop thrice before settling at the present premises and these may have been lost during these moves."

Pradhan mentions another horrific loss, but in regard to J. Burlington Smith (ill 5, 6): "I remember my father telling me that this studio was originally situated near the present Post Office. It was bought out by M. Sain, a very famous landscape painter from Darjeeling and relocated on Nehru Road at the shops occupied presently by Singh Studio and Bata Shoe Shop. I have no details when Mr. Sain closed his business, but I do know that Singh Studio, which was earlier in the Bazar area moved up to the present location in 1935. It



**ill 6:** *The back of this real photo card is generic but through The Alkazi Collection I've been able to identify the image as one made by Burlington Studios. The woman is Tibetan, possibly from Tsang.*

is very sad but nearly all of Burlington's plate negatives were lost, because Mr. Sain's family in Calcutta sold them as glass, after removing the gelatine images!"

My heart stopped when I read the above paragraph as the Burlington cards, most are real photos, are amongst my very favorites. I should add that all the Das and Singh cards I possess were printed on actual photo paper and made from original negatives. Frequently, titles were either handwritten on the cards or on the plates themselves (ill 2, 4). According to Pradhan, many Das cards were hand-tinted in watercolors.

D.D. Pradhan notes that the S. Singh Studio (ill 2) still exists and is operated by the two

grandsons of the original owner. He mentions that they have a good collection of their early cards, and he thinks that they still have the plates taken by their grandfather in the late 1920s.

A. Hefferan continues to be a mystery. The Hefferan cards (ill 7) in my collection are views of Darjeeling, printed in Japan in black and white. Some are hand-tinted; other are not. All were distributed by "Master's Curios, Darjeeling, Simla and Lucknow". Pradhan was given some Master's Curio cards in the late 1940s, some years after the closing of that business, by a member of the Master's family, "a much loved medical practitioner in Darjeeling".

Judging by my collection, the most prolific turn-of-the-century photographer in Darjeeling was Th. Paar (ill 8, 9). I'm still not sure if it's Theodore or Thomas. Pradhan mentions that "his studio was in Calcutta, but obviously he must have had a branch here too (probably open during the summer/autumn seasons only)". He doesn't know when the business closed down or what happened to the original negatives/plates.

John Falconer expands our knowledge of Paar by noting that he was an assistant to R. Hotz, photographer, Simla 1893. He writes that Paar is listed as a photographer in Darjeeling, 1905 - 1909, but feels that he was active there from the 1890s. Falconer also mentions that: "A P. Paar, either a relative or a mistake for T. Paar, was assistant to the photographer F. Ahrle at Poona in 1890".

Sophie Gordon and I feel that Th. Paar may have been in Darjeeling past 1909 as the very famous photograph (and postcard) of the 13th Dalai Lama which was taken as he fled from Tibet into India in 1910 appears to be attributable to Paar (ill 10). Gordon says: "It has been suggested (that) he (Paar) photographed the 13th Dalai Lama as the latter fled China for India". I have the "Th. Paar, Photographer, Darjeeling" postcard of the Dalai Lama, as well as a colorized version with "D. Macropolo & Co., Calcutta" on the back.

In my collection of Paar cards there are four that are 4 3/4" x 3 1/2". While slightly longer than a 19th century British "court card", they are (con't next page)

**ill 7:** "No. 49. Winter View" Printed in Japan, this A. Hefferan card has "Master's Curios" printed on reverse and the card's purchaser has written: "Darjeeling in winter time. Have not experienced this yet, thank goodness!!"



**ill 8:** "Darjeeling - Himalaya, Bhutia Coolies" postcard by "Th. Paar, Photogr., Darjeeling". Postally unused and of normal size, but probably one of his earlier 20th century cards.



**ill 9:** "Nepaly Lady" by "Th. Paar, Darjeeling". I have nine of these white-bordered cards, all studio shots, and none is postally used.

smaller than the norm of the time. Three are postally used: 1902, 1904 and 1905. The 1905 "Kinchenjunga" card is done "in relief", so that you can actually feel the topography of the mountain and surrounding environs. Two others are montages of local scenes and people (*ill 11*).

D. D. Pradhan notes that in checking *Thacker's Postal Directory*, which was published annually and listed the businesses and residents of Darjeeling, he found but two photographic studios listed in the 19th century. One was Harrington & Norman, the other Kapp & Co. Neither appears on postcards to my knowledge. However, even though unlisted, a number of other photographic studios and photographers seem to have been operating in the Darjeeling area.

The legendary photographic firm of Bourne & Shepherd, Calcutta, produced a "Witch of Ghoom" postcard (*ill 12*), as well as studio portraits which became postcards of "A Hill Coolie Girl" and "A Bhutia Coolie". Ghoom is just a stone's throw from Darjeeling; the two "coolie" cards feature Bhutia people, a favorite subject of Darjeeling photographers. Bhutias are Tibetans who moved south into the northern reaches of Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan. Photographers used the terms interchangeably.

Arthur Ollman tells us in his book, *SAMUEL BOURNE Images of India* (1983, The friends of Photography), that in 1869 "here (in Darjeeling), Bourne completed at least forty-five negatives, mostly of local attractions, but also including some of the most wonderful forest scenes ever made... Bourne did very few ethnographic studies, and most of those listed in the B&S catalogue were made by Shepherd, who specialized in what he called 'native types.' In Darjeeling, however, Bourne made five of the finest portraits he ever made, three of them of groups of Bhooteas."

If one judges 19th and early 20th century Dar-

jeeling by its postcards, the hill station was a wonderful mix of Himalayan peoples from Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim (Sikhim) and Tibet. A number of cards feature "Lepchas", who are indigenous to eastern Nepal, Sikkim and western Bhutan. I have no close-up postcard images of Indian and only a few of British women, all in travelling chairs.

Finally, I'd like to return to Johnston & Hoffmann. I mentioned at the beginning of this article that the firm was commissioned by L. A. Waddell in the 1880s to take portraits of "types of natives of Nepal, Sikhim and Tibet." John Falconer tells us that the Johnston & Hoffmann photographic firm was established in Calcutta around 1882, "with a Darjeeling branch managed by Hoffmann from around 1890. Mounts of some photographs in 1890s also advertise a Simla branch. Business managed by P.A. Johnston (d. 1891) and Theodore Julius Hoffmann (c. 1855 - 1921). Burma branch at 70 Phayre Street, Rangoon, 1889-90. From 1905 until the 1930s the business was managed by A.D. Long. Still trading in the 1950s." Falconer also notes that "in July 1891", he (Hoffmann) made a trip to Kanchinjunga with John Claude White (qv), described in *Exploration in Sikkim, to the north-east of Kanchinjunga*, (Royal Geographical Society proceedings, no.9, Sep 1892, pp. 613-8)."

I should mention that White is very well known for his photographs of Sikkim and Tibet, many of which were published by Johnston & Hoffmann. As an interesting aside, White and Waddell were involved in separate British military forays into Tibet with Sir Francis Younghusband in the early 1900s.

The Johnston & Hoffmann photo-credit does appear on postcards, but none of my Darjeeling cards carry its name. I've been able to identify the firm's photographs on Darjeeling-inscribed cards through books and The Alkazi Collection (*ill 13, 14*).

In at least one instance, the exact same person who was used as a model for the 1880s Johnston & Hoffmann/Waddell study also appeared on an early 20th century postcard



**ill 10:** The 13th Dalai Lama fled Tibet in 1910 when the Chinese invaded. He stayed in the Darjeeling district when not on tour in India. The Chinese Army withdrew from Lhasa in 1912. Card by Th. Paar.

(*ill 15*). However, there is a striking difference between the anthropological study and the postcard format. The Waddell-commissioned photographic prints that I've seen in books show an empty, monotone background behind the subject. However, studio images which appeared 15 or 20 years later on postcards, but which I believe were taken at the time of the Waddell study, feature painted backdrops and freshly-hewn vegetation. The latter presented a kinder and more welcoming image of Darjeeling, India's famous gateway to the Himalaya. —



**ill 11:** "Greetings from Darjeeling" Postally dated March 31, 1902, Darjeeling and mailed to Lima, Ohio. Arrived April 28th. Gertrude writes about the "most beautiful scenery in the world and the eternal snows" on this smallish Th. Paar card.



**ill 12:** “The Witch of Ghoom” card displays a “Photo Bourne & Shepherd” imprint at bottom left. Postally unused.



**ill 13, 14:** “These two Darjeeling cards, “Thibetan Woman” and “A Lepcha” feature Johnston & Hoffmann photographs. She is variously described in books as “Wife of Tasi, Peropoa of Tibet” and “Tibetan woman from Tashi-Lumpo”.



## RESOURCES AND THANK YOU'S

I have borrowed extensively from Christopher Pinney’s *CAMERA INDICA: The Social Life of Indian Photographs*, (The University of Chicago Press, 1997). John Falconer and his chapter, “Photography in Nineteenth Century India”, *THE RAJ: India and the British 1600-1947*, (C.A. Bayly, editor; National Portrait Gallery (London), 1990), have been wonderfully helpful! Also useful are *From Merchants to Emperors* by Pratapaditya Pal and Vidya Dehejia, (Cornell University Press, 1986) and *TIBET The Sacred Realm* by Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, (Aperture, 1983).

I also wish to thank D.D. Pradhan, Das Studio, Darjeeling; Sophie Gordon of SEPIA International Inc./The Alkazi Collection of Photography, London; Arthur Ollman, Director, Museum of Photographic Arts, San Diego; Mike Weaver, “History of Photography” Journal, Oxford, and fellow collector/enthusiast Jeremy Brewer in Kent.

Thanks go to Linda Briscoe, Photography and Film, University of Texas at Austin; Jonathan Green and Donald Parker, University of California, Riverside/California Museum of Photography; Mark Haworth-Booth, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Gill Thompson, The Royal Photographic Society, Bath, and Clark Worswick, noted author on the photography of India.

### > **ill 15:**

“Darjeeling. Group of Two Lepchas.” This is a Macropolo & Co. postcard but I believe it is a Johnston & Hoffmann photograph as both men are photo subjects of the latter. Also, the standing Lepcha posed for the Waddell study.

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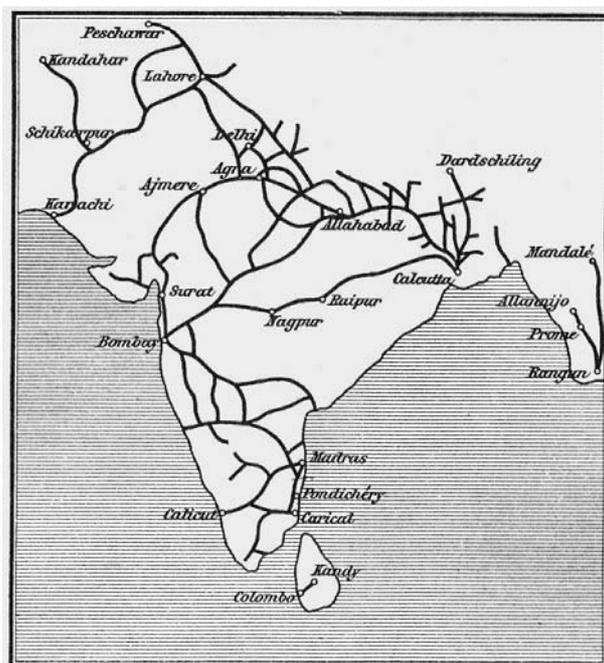


Fig. 123. Die Hauptbahnen Vorderindiens.

<< **Ed. note:** I have taken the liberty to add this map of major railway routes of ‘Near India’ (around 1895) to Sally Fall’s article. From “Weltverkehr: Die Entwicklung von Seeschifffahrt, Eisenbahn, Post und Telegraphie, by Michael Geistbeck, Freiburg/Brsg. 1895 (2nd edition)”. Wonder if you can find “Darjeeling” (health resort) on this map – the spelling is very exotic indeed! The Himalaya railway route must be very impressive. Average gradient of the railway line (at that time) = 1:36. The journey by rail from Bombay to Calcutta took about 60 hours for the 2250 km’s in the mid 1890’s; from Bombay to Madras 40 hours (1270 km’s). And these were major routes!