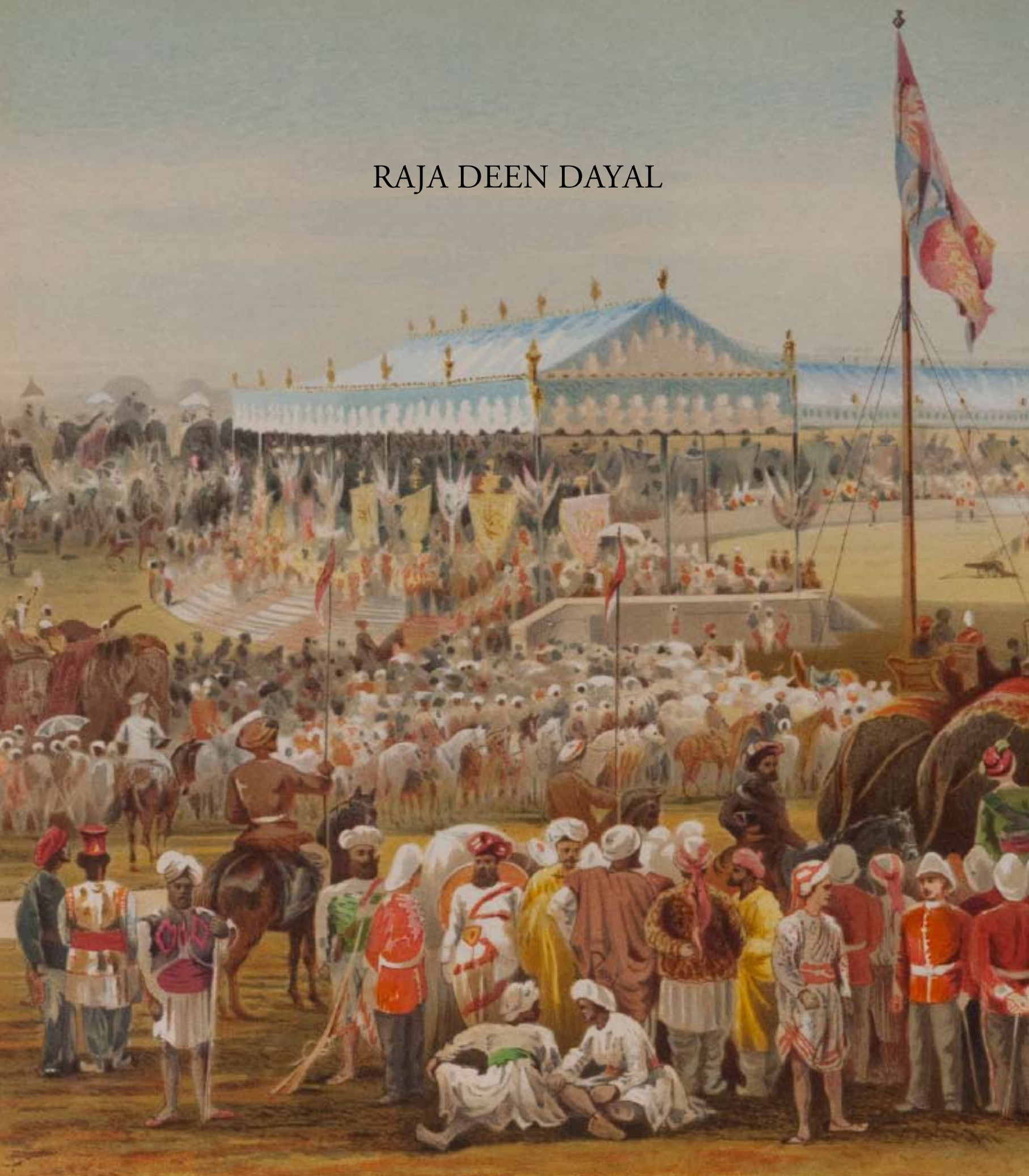


RAJA DEEN DAYAL







# THE LIMITS OF PHOTOGRAPHY: THE DAYAL STUDIO'S CORONATION ALBUM, 1903

*Deepali Dewan*

## Introduction

In 1903, the firm of Raja Deen Dayal & Sons—hereafter referred to as the Dayal Studio—was present at the Delhi Durbar along with other photographic firms and individuals with cameras eager to capture the ceremonial events.<sup>1</sup> Raja Deen Dayal himself was present with his eldest son Gyan Chand, accompanied by several assistants and multiple cameras. The result of their efforts was over 400 photographs documenting the imperial spectacle, out of which about 100 images were arranged in a lavish photographic album available for purchase. After the festivities were over and the tents packed, this album of images hardly found an audience—relegated to the margins of durbar documentation and instigating the downfall of arguably one of the most successful photo studios of nineteenth-century India. This essay explores the limits of photography—both in an expansive and contractive sense—that is, the medium's frontiers and its limitations. It argues that the Dayal Studio's Coronation Album serves as a counter-narrative to the spectacle of imperial conquest by literally and metaphorically centering the Nizam's body in specific photographs as well as in the sequence of images within the album as a whole. In this way, the album's construction pushes the boundaries of the medium as

something more than simply a chronicler of the durbar's events. At the same time, it argues that the commercial failure of the album points to a shift in ocular epistemology at the turn of the century, when it seemed the medium was no longer sufficient to address the representational problems or desires of a new era.

The photographs produced by the Dayal Studio are interesting not only for their individual content but also the manner in which they are organised in the album format—their orientation, their composition on a page, and the narrative they convey—underscoring the profound role context plays in constructing meaning in photographic images. By 1903, photographic albums had been produced by the Dayal Studio for over a decade, and several “ready-made” albums were featured in their 1896 studio catalogue. Across the albums there can be observed the reoccurrence of similar modes of representation, narrative sequencing and visual strategies that the Dayal Studio had become adept at employing in deliberate ways. In the case of the Coronation Album, these are deployed as a way to centre the Nizam of Hyderabad, one of the many Indian rulers who attended the durbar ceremonies, and considered pre-eminent among them for having the largest and wealthiest territory.<sup>2</sup> As official photographer to the Nizam, the Dayal Studio was at the Delhi Durbar, in part, as part of the Nizam's entourage (even though they had to cover their expenses themselves). While the durbar itself was an imperial spectacle meant to celebrate British conquest, the photographs taken by the

*Previous pages*

93 HANHART

Imperial Assemblage at Delhi, 1 January 1877 from  
'The History of the Imperial Assemblage at Delhi', 1878  
Coloured Lithograph, 267 x 444 mm



Dayal Studio provide an alternate or counter-narrative. Their Coronation Album is not about the durbar itself, but rather about the presence of the Nizam at the durbar. Visual strategies employed in the album push the medium of photography in new directions in order to satisfy what can be seen as competing agendas—to satisfy the Nizam as patron and to create a document of the imperial event that could be marketed to a tourist audience.

And yet, following the durbar, the Dayal Studio's hopes for the Nizam's Government to place a large order of albums were not realized. Many times in the past, the Hyderabad Government had indeed ordered numerous albums of visiting dignitaries to the territory of Hyderabad, which would then be used as gifts at court. In this way, the Government of Hyderabad has been over the years an important patron of the Dayal Studio's activities, and in many ways, their self-image at this time was constructed through an engagement with photography. Yet, despite the studio's efforts to focus their documentation of the durbar on the Nizam, a substantial order did not come through; as a result, the firm could not cover the exorbitant costs they had incurred in Delhi, leading the business toward a financial decline from which they never fully recovered.

Aside from the devastating consequences for the business, this commercial failure is instructive, for it reveals a moment in the history of modernity when there was a profound shift in ocular epistemology around the turn of the century. The shift is linked to the sociological phenomenon of the democratisation of photography, and a corresponding change in how people perceived their worlds and negotiated these perceptions. This reworking of the visual paradigms privileged an entirely different way of seeing. In this context, the medium of photography was seen as limited in how it captured events like the durbar, especially alongside the emergent medium of film, which was also present in 1903. While specific moments in the Dayal Studio's Coronation Album reveal an attempt to foreground the

logic of spectacle—understood as an event memorable for its appearance—it does not succeed, thus revealing the limits of the photographic medium.

The Dayal Studio's Coronation Album comes at a time of transformative change in the history of photography in India. Christopher Pinney identifies the turn of the century as a moment when the colonial state's perception of photography shifts from one of "cure" to one of "poison".<sup>3</sup> This poetic evocation points to the accelerating advances in the medium's technology which made it more accessible to a wider population and hence less under the control of the state, producing a new sense of anxiety around the use of the medium. The Dayal Studio's Coronation Album is an example of how this shift was not bound by the colonial state alone but rather indicative of a larger transformation within the development of modernity and the practice of photography that had a profound effect on its existing structures, such as commercial studios, and the networks and visual modes within which they operated.

### **The Images**

Surviving images of the durbar by the Dayal Studio are all contained in an album or mounted on pages that were once part of an album. This is the case in all the collections consulted for this essay: The Alkazi Collection of Photography, New Delhi; the British Library, London; the Salar Jung Museum, Hyderabad; and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto. However there are loose prints in the British Library that were at one point in the collection of Viceroy Curzon, likely given to him during or soon after the durbar. In the case of the albums, while sharing the same overall format, they exhibit some differences in the arrangement of images, underscoring the manner in which each album was put together by hand despite being a product of mass reproduction technology.

The Dayal Studio's Coronation Album is lavish in size and scope, reflecting the grandeur of the durbar ceremony it



*Left*

94 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**

Album Cover of The Coronation Durbar, Delhi  
1903, 1903

Green full-morocco with gilt titling, 327 x 445 mm

*Below*

95 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**

Review. Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Marching Past,  
1903, Detail

Silver Gelatin Print, 176 x 292 mm

See Fig 103 for full image.

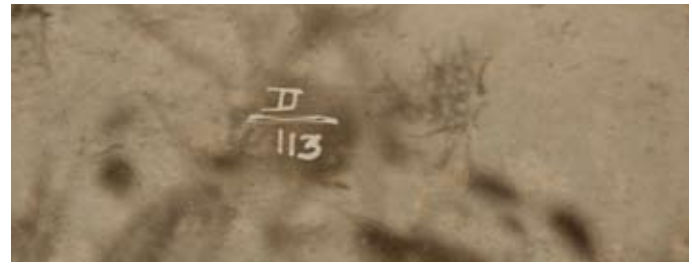


sought to document (fig. 94).. Bound in full Moroccan leather with the gilt inscriptions on the cover stating “The Coronation Durbar, Delhi 1903” and “Raja Deen Dayal & Sons, Bombay & Secunderabad”, it is consistent in look and feel with most Dayal Studio albums from the 1890s and early 1900s. Inside the front cover is a label stating “Bound at Caxton Works, Bombay”. Based on other examples, the Dayal Studio likely purchased a pre-made album and then arranged the photographs on the blank pages. About 100 images are contained inside the album, placed one to four images per page, on both sides of the page. They range in size from 3 x 5 to 7 x 12 inches and below each image are letterpress captions that include the subject and negative number. The photographs include: the State Entry, the Opening of the Art Exhibition, the Reading of the Proclamation, the Assault at Arms, the Review of Native Retainers, the Review of Troops, the Polo Tournament and the Departure. Other images not identified with a specific function in the durbar programme are also included, such as group portraits of the Imperial Cadet Corps and the Gymnastic Team, views of where the viceroy and native rulers stayed and the military manoeuvres that were organised in the weeks preceding the durbar.

While Deen Dayal may have taken numerous photographs, many were also taken by his eldest son Gyan Chand (fig. 95), in the middle foreground, slightly left of centre, wearing the Hyderabad *sherwani* and turban)<sup>4</sup> as there are shots of the same activity taken from different angles, indicating that there were at least two cameras focusing on the event



96 BOMBAY GAZETTE  
12 January 1903, page 2

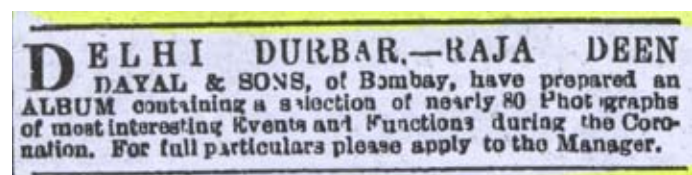


97 RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS  
Gun coming into Action in Awkward Place, 1903, Detail  
Silver Gelatin Print, 139 x 206 mm

See Fig. 105 for full image.

simultaneously. As indicated by an ad in the *Bombay Gazette*, they had set up a photograph studio at the durbar camp where clients could walk in and have formal portraits taken or place orders for photographs of the durbar activities (fig. 96); no doubt as a means to partly support themselves while in Delhi. This initiative was the most complex in the history of the Dayal Studio and perhaps more elaborate than that undertaken by any other firm.

It is noteworthy that within the logistics of running a large photographic firm, the photographs taken at the Delhi Durbar are not numbered within the regular sequence of images recorded in their studio registers. Rather, the durbar photographs were given a separate numbering system—1-400s—underscoring the significant nature of the event for the firm. These negative numbers, in most of the images, are featured in white on the lower left-hand corner (fig.



98 BOMBAY GAZETTE  
12 February 1903, page 2



97). The early ones have the letter ‘D’—presumably for “Durbar”—over the number, and later ones bear just the number.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, the negative numbers do not follow the order of events at the durbar, indicating that they were written on the images at a later date. Of the approximately 400 photographs taken through the course of the durbar, about 200 were of the military manoeuvres taken in the weeks preceding the durbar itself, a selection of which were included in an album of the durbar activities available for purchase (fig. 98). The images with negative numbers in the 400s and above seem to be manipulations of other images earlier in the sequence, cropped and enlarged to offer greater detail or give a closer vantage point to the subject. Such manipulation shows a high degree of technical skill, applied in order to achieve a visual effect generally not possible with existing cameras. Such a large number of images and the corresponding materials required to produce them—not to mention the cost of an extended stay in the Delhi—were nothing less than an inordinate out-of-pocket expense.

### **The Nizam as Centre**

By 1903, the Dayal Studio was well known as photographers to a range of elite British and Indian patrons. Dayal’s long and highly productive career had taken him from the Public Works Department of Central India to the princely state of Hyderabad where his expertise was quickly acknowledged. From late 1887 onwards, Dayal photographed buildings and monuments of archaeological significance in the Nizam’s territories. He also documented events in the Nizam’s dominions, such as visits by viceroys and rulers of other countries. He was appointed as the Nizam’s official photographer in November 1894 (fig. 64). This was one of many titles held by the Dayal Studio and in many ways the most significant. With it came a regular salary of Rs. 600 per month in the tradition of court painters who chronicled significant happenings at court.

The Coronation Album is both similar and different from the studio’s earlier projects for the Nizam. It is similar in that



- 99 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**  
H.H. the Nizam’s Elephant (Enlarged), Delhi Coronation Durbar 1903, 1903  
Silver Gelatin print, 263 x 197 mm

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- 100 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**  
1903 Delhi Durbar, Elephant Procession, H.H. The Nizam Leading the Procession, January 1903  
Printing-out paper, 204 x 282 mm (Photographer’s ref. 135)  
Royal Ontario Museum, 2006.27.1.11  
*Photo by Brian Boyle, courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum, 2011*



it follows the format of other presentation albums made for the ruler. It opens with the arrival of the viceroy at the train station, and closes with his departure; between the two ends are images focusing on the heads of state organised with a degree of formality and according to prevalent hierarchies. The album is different because it is the only presentation album in the Dayal Studio oeuvre that does not take place in the Nizam's territories. In this case, the Nizam is a visitor at the viceroy's party, rather than playing host himself, significantly altering the status of the Nizam and thereby the meaning of the documented event itself within the trajectory of the Nizam's influence.

In the Dayal Studio's Coronation Album, a strong sense of hierarchy is maintained in the flow of images, mirroring the spatial hierarchy pervading the durbar itself, from the placement of tents to the order of the procession and the amphitheatre's seating arrangement. The Duke of Connaught, being the King's direct blood relative and representative at the durbar, is presented first; then the viceroy; then the Nizam, followed by the various other Indian rulers. Nonetheless, throughout the album, the Dayal Studio also used various visual strategies to make the Nizam the central and most important focus of the narrative. For instance, in individual images, visual strategies of emphasizing the ruler in group settings learned from pre-colonial imaging practices such as



court painting are appropriated into photography through composition. The image of the Nizam in procession on a large elephant (fig. 99) is taken from the steps of the Jama Masjid, where many photographers were poised in order to obtain the best views. The Nizam's profile and torso are seen clearly under the canopy of the *howdah* in the foreground, his light turban and sash contrasting with his dark suit. The lack of overlap with any background figures ensures that the Nizam stands out despite the photograph being taken from a distance.

In front of the elephant is Major Afsar Daula, the commander of the Nizam's army, who had recently returned from England after attending the main coronation ceremony as official representative of the Nizam. The angle of his light-coloured turban against the dark mass of the elephant creates a diagonal leading up to the Nizam. In the background, directly above the Nizam, the domes of the fort's main gate mime the contours of the Nizam's turban and canopy. The composition thus carefully visualises a line down the centre of the image, emphasising that the Nizam's head is at the centre of the picture plane. The alignment of canopy and domes evoke successive halos emanating from the Nizam's head, akin to portraits of rulers in Indian miniature painting that also follow a convention of deliberately centering the body of the ruler. The diagonal line of the soldiers in the middle ground cuts across the picture plane generating depth and intersecting with the howdah creating a link to the Nizam from all areas within the frame, presenting him both as the literal and symbolic centre.

In many ways, the image works against the general claim of photography to capture 'reality' through naturalism and single-point perspective. The Nizam appears to be the largest element in the picture, in keeping with conventions of hierarchical scale in painting. Further, the image shows a fair amount of manipulation of the photographic surface in the interest of a desired outcome. It is in fact a cropped and enlarged version of another photograph with which



- 101 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**  
1903 Delhi Durbar, Durbar. H.H. The Nizam Greeting  
H.R.H. the Duke [Duke of Connaught], January 1903  
Printing-out paper, 267 x 210 mm (Photographer's ref. 263a)  
Royal Ontario Museum, 2006.27.1.25  
*Photo by Brian Boyle, courtesy of the Royal Ontario Museum,*  
2011

*Facing page*

- 102 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**  
Durbar. Herald Reading Proclamation, 1903  
Silver Gelatin Print, 185 x 288 mm (Photographer's Ref: 264)



it matches perfectly (fig. 100). This manipulation can be tracked by comparing the general view and the close-up. The latter was most likely developed with an exposure manipulated to produce a crisp line and finer detail. The fort in the background of the close-up is considerably darker and more defined than in the general view where it appears faded due to atmospheric effect. Such a manipulation—which likely occurred through touch-ups on the surface of the negative itself—shows an experimental approach to the photograph image in order to get a desired effect.

This image is also made significant by its position and orientation in the sequence of images in the album. While the image in the Alkazi Collection is no longer bound in the album, the album in the Salar Jung collection places the photograph directly after the entry of the viceroy. Further, both these images stand out by being vertically oriented (portrait view) in a horizontally oriented sequence of images, suggesting equal status between the viceroy and the Nizam. This is one strategy deployed by the studio in its representation of hierarchy that asserts the logic of empire while simultaneously envisioning a parallel or alternative



power structure. Another example is the sequence of images documenting the proclamation ceremony that features the viceroy greeting the Nizam at the podium (fig. 101). This one is also vertically oriented and in the narrative of the album stands out from the preceding horizontally oriented images. In this way, the chronological sequence of the images in the album is subservient to the direction in which the image is mounted on the album page. These vertically oriented images make sense only in the context of the album and suggest considerable forethought. From the beginning, it seems the Dayal Studio intended the photographs to emphasise the Nizam through their individual construction and their placement in a visual narrative.

Other images focus on the Nizam in different ways. In some, the Nizam is centred on the picture plane even if he himself is not actually visible in the photograph. For instance, in one view of the amphitheatre, its wings extend beyond the frame, creating three distinct horizontal bands across the picture plane of alternating light and dark (fig. 102). The curve of the procession path leads the viewer's eye from the lower right side into the middle ground of the picture and the podium where the viceroy is giving his speech. While the composition apparently focuses on the viceroy, the actual centre of the picture plane lies to the left of the podium where the Nizam was seated, too distant to be actually visible, in the second block extending away from the viceroy's seat, in accordance with hierarchical seating assignment at the durbar.<sup>6</sup> In this way, a detail that the eye cannot see yet the camera still captures, is significant in the resulting photographic image. The deliberate nature of this image is underscored by the fact that views of this imperial moment by other photographers are largely from the opposite side of the amphitheatre. In contrast, the Dayal Studio's image is carefully positioned to reinforce the figure of the Nizam as the literal centre of the photo and, by extension, the metaphoric centre of the political universe within, and perhaps despite, the events of the durbar.

Aside from composition, frame, and vantage, the subject matter of an image, in its connotative meaning, also functions to centre the Nizam. Images of objects and people function as a symbolic apparatus, to be read as an extension of the ruler's body and thus extensions of the state of Hyderabad, that is, satellites of the Nizam's dominions in Delhi. For instance, the album includes views of the Nizam's camp and his temporary residence at Ludlow Castle. According to Stephen Wheeler:

... each of these encampments, with its little military force, its Durbar hall, its quarters for the residence of different classes of retainers, and its bazaar, became itself a miniature town transplanted from the territory of the Chief to which it belonged.<sup>7</sup>

Further, regarding the elaborate arrangements made for the Nizam of Hyderabad:

The exterior of [Ludlow Castle] was completely transformed by the setting of bright yellow – the Hyderabad state colour – which now framed it: there were yellow flowers in the garden, yellow flags and banners, and everywhere men in the same brilliant yellow livery. A miniature replica of the Char Minar at Hyderabad was erected at the entrance to the grounds... There was also erected near the castle a portable canvas mosque, with minarets and every detail complete, which it is understood the Nizam always takes with him when traveling.<sup>8</sup>

In pragmatic terms these elaborate accommodations served as a mobile capital for Hyderabad state; as photographs, the album asserts these images as an architectural manifestation of the Nizam's authority.

The strategic nature of what images have been included in the Coronation Album is made more apparent by a

consideration of what has been left out. Conspicuous absences include the carefully rehearsed reception of the native rulers, despite the fact that at this event the Nizam was awarded the Grand Cross of the Order of Bath (G.C.B.) the highest honour in the empire. While it may have been due to the complexity of the ceremony or the level of restricted access to photographers, its exclusion from the album makes an expedient political statement on the part of the Nizam. To be decorated in this manner was undoubtedly an honour, but it also implied Hyderabad's subjugation to British authority. Inclusion of this event would have in many ways gone against the semiotic thrust of the album. Wheeler suggests that the Nizam received the G.C.B., presented directly by the Duke of Connaught himself, in recognition of an agreement regarding the territory of Berar, which was then leased to the British Government in perpetuity for an annual rent of Rs. 25 lakhs. Berar—a particularly fertile tract of land—became a significant source of revenue for the colonial administration and was a site of contention between the British and the Hyderabad Government from the time of the prior Nizam's rule. The 1903 agreement

... put an end to a long and at one time embittered controversy [and] was equally beneficial to both parties, for it provided an assured instead of a precarious source of revenue to the Nizam, while it enabled the Government of India to carry out a number of important military and administrative reforms.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the bestowal of the award—despite the honorific overtones—was coloured by political undertones. Whatever the motive on both sides, in imagistic terms, the related rite of decoration has assumed a conspicuous gap in the photographic narrative. This gap allowed the studio to shape the Nizam's centrality and prominence in the visual narrative in a specifically nuanced way.

### Commercial Failure

The 1903 Delhi Durbar was a financial disaster for the Dayal Studio. In a letter dated 11 August, 1903 from the studio to the Nizam's government, Dayal admits that “we had to incur some very heavy expenses in putting up our Studio at Delhi... and we regret to say that the orders obtained by us there have not paid even our bare expenses”.<sup>10</sup> Dayal and his son Gyan Chand were in Delhi making preparations as early as October 1902; they stayed well after the durbar was over, as indicated in an ad for the Durbar Studio that ran in the *Bombay Gazette* until at least early February 1903. The studio had hoped for numerous orders from the Nizam's government, with each album priced at Rs. 500.<sup>11</sup> In the past the government had ordered up to seventeen copies of an album for presentation purposes. In this case, the Nizam ordered only two copies that were deposited in his residence at King Kothi and at the Faluknama Palace.<sup>12</sup> Dayal's letter pleaded for the Nizam's government to order more, but to no avail. The official explanation provided was that the state was experiencing a lack of funds as a result of the massive expenditure required in order to attend the durbar—a topic of frequent criticism in the national press.

In 1903, Hyderabad had just emerged from a large famine that had depleted the state budget, yet the Nizam was compelled to attend the Delhi ceremonies with a large entourage befitting his status in the native hierarchy. According to the official durbar catalogue, the Nizam's entourage contained 30 high officials, 180 horses, 20 carriages, 18 elephants and 970 soldiers.<sup>13</sup> There had also been a change in personnel in the Nizam's administration: the photography-loving Prime Minister Sir Asman Jah, who had approved and likely initiated many of the orders given to the Dayal Studio, had retired in 1894 and was later succeeded by Maharaja Sir Kishen Pershad, who served from 1901 to 1912 and was known for his reformist economic policies and conservative handling of government finances.



Yet despite these circumstances, the lack of government patronage also may have stemmed from the nature of the event—a ritualised exercise to demonstrate loyalty to the British crown. This was not a platform the Nizam necessarily wanted to perform on, nor have his mandatory performance memorialised in a photographic album. In a speech upon returning to Hyderabad, the Nizam suggests his presence at the durbar ceremonies was a continuation of the precedent set by his ancestors, rather than an act of autonomous choice:

... I was enabled to take my part in the Coronation Durbar of His Majesty the Emperor of India... and after the custom of my ancestors to show, in a simple, straightforward and soldierly manner, by word and deed, my historical friendship and loyalty...<sup>14</sup>

This sense of acting out of a sense of duty was articulated in how he carried himself during the durbar. Various genres of commentary on the durbar during and after the event repeatedly mention the sober and unspectacular demeanour of the Nizam. Unlike commentaries on the other native rulers, which lingered in detail regarding their costume and jewels, as if they were minor extravaganzas in themselves, the Nizam was described as “simply attired but for the insignia of the Star of India” or “attired in sober black, but with a diamond aigrette sparking from his yellow turban”.<sup>15</sup> In many ways, the Nizam resisted being mapped into the voyeuristic and fetishistic seductions of imperial theatre.

The native rulers, their modes of conveyance and their costume were the focus of much and continual attention. They were a main part of the spectacle of the durbar and constituted hyperbolic signifiers in the grammar of visual excess, akin to the living exhibits featured at large world exhibitions in Europe during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The durbar camp in many ways was the British Raj in miniature, compelled to convene in Delhi for

a fortnight for avid perusal and appraisal by visitors from around the world. In contrast, the photographs taken by the Dayal Studio reflect the restrained appearance of the Nizam, not the pomp and circumstance used for the representation of the other native rulers. Yet for the Nizam’s government, this was not enough. The very nature of the imperial spectacle compelled a lack of government patronage that the studio had relied on in the past and toward which the album had been put together in the first place. Further, in an unfortunate twist, these same muted images did not appeal to the larger, especially European, “tourist” viewership either. For them, quite simply, the photographs were not spectacular enough.<sup>16</sup>

### **Visual Transitions / Tensions**

The 1903 Delhi Durbar coincided with a sharp turn in the history and development of photography. Since the development of the Kodak camera in 1888, photographic techniques had become successively easier to adopt and deploy, and were more accessible to a wider audience. In 1903, many people attending the durbar had cameras and enthusiastically created their own documentation. One young British girl recalls coming across a crowd of onlookers “photographing a most weird person, a Siamese... dressed in a costume of cloth of gold fashioned on the lines of a pagoda and hat to match [who] was being snap-shotted on all sides...”<sup>17</sup> The relative democratisation of the medium helped produce a shift in ocular experience, compelling new ways of seeing things that incorporated the spontaneous audacious brio of the “snapshot” and the vivid grain of the “close-up”. No longer of interest were posed and choreographed images, at least not for the Delhi Durbar. This marked a new visual epistemology, in the light of which the Dayal Studio photographs were both progressive and regressive for their time: while effectively incorporating existing visual strategies from Indian painting traditions, they failed to reflect the radically new ways of seeing and experiencing the world.



The transformation mandated, at least partially, a move from surveillance to a spectacle mode. While the former included general views, aerial vantage points, and much activity captured within a frame, it resulted in fairly static images where movement occurred in the distance and lines were crisp. There was certain rigidity in these views, like a carefully composed painting, in which the stylised aesthetic and the inner logic of relationship between components of the image could hold symbolic meaning. Spectacle involved the action-filled close-up shot, which possessed a dissenting energy that mediating between the components of the image, distributed without apparent ritualised hierarchy.

- 103 **RAJA DEEN DAYAL AND SONS**  
Review. Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Marching Past, 1903  
Silver Gelatin Print, 176 x 292 mm







The Dayal Studio's Coronation Album reveals a tension between these two modes, asserting one while trying to include the other in an attempt to make the album desirable to as wide an audience as possible. For example, both modes can be identified in the photographs of the Military Review. In "Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers Marching Past" (fig. 103), the line of soldiers is contained within the frame. The photograph is taken from a slightly higher angle. The emphasis is not on the details of the individual soldiers but on the general effect of the scene. The image is organised in bands of light and dark, with the diagonal of the fence and armed guard on the sidelines. The flagpole at centre left counters the horizontality of the composition. Even the white posts of the fence stand upright like little soldiers. The dominant rigidity and incorporation of line seem to suggest the order and discipline of the troops. The formations march diagonally toward the camera with controlled momentum, contrasted by the relaxed postures of the onlookers at the sidelines,

Compare this with "Lord Kitchener and Staff Leaving", a close-up view of the chief of the British Indian army and his staff (fig. 104). The photograph is taken over the heads of a crowd. The picture plane is broken up into just two bands, the skyline and the ground, the locus of all activity. While the troops in the background convey a sense of discipline and order, the mounted soldiers in the foreground are not presented in a sense of assembly from this angle. The focus seems to be on individuals, and in general on the spectacle of celebrity in the form of the heroes of the army. The photograph was likely taken by Gyan Chand, who can be seen in the distance of the former photograph (in fig. 103), taking photos from a closer vantage among a group of other photographers.

104 **RAJA DEENDAYAL AND SONS**  
Lord Kitchener and Staff Leaving, 1903  
Silver Gelatin Print, 170 x 286 mm



An attempt to render spectacle is also seen in two other ways. The first is in a series of photographs of the military manoeuvres that took place in the weeks preceding the actual durbar. Almost annually, the Indian army would gather on the plains of northern India to practice new tactics and strategies in the art of warfare. From at least 1886 onwards, Dayal had been present to photograph camp exercises in and around Delhi and had made a name for himself through his skilled compositions. The manoeuvres before the 1903 durbar were special. As Wheeler puts it:

It was the first time that an opportunity had been afforded for a large army in India to apply the principles and employ the methods learnt during the war in South Africa... The heavy artillery included, for the first time at maneuvers, 30-pounders, 6-inch howitzers, and 5-inch guns, and the new 10-pounder gun for mountain batteries. Mounted Infantry, trained in the new schools, and Mounted Gurkhas were employed; as well as a camel corps. And never before since the short service system was introduced... could British corps in India have shown such a proportion of seasoned material in the ranks.<sup>18</sup>

No other photographers seemed present at these manoeuvres. Yet by the time the ceremonials began, the Dayal Studio had taken almost 200 photographs. While these images constitute almost half of the total photographs taken at the durbar, they are relegated to the end of the album; perhaps because the studio realised that, regrettably, the images were not of interest to the general public. Nonetheless, these are some of the most successful photographs taken by the Dayal Studio at the 1903 durbar. They tend to focus on moments in the camp exercises conveying the innovation and skill of the army as well as their commitment and strength of spirit. For example, several images show a group of soldiers moving a large gun (fig. 105). Bounded by chiaroscuro, the men converge in a unified mass around the weapon in the centre middle ground of the photograph. Suggesting illusory



105 **RAJA DEENDAYAL AND SONS**  
Gun coming into Action in Awkward Place, 1903  
Silver Gelatin Print, 139 x 206 mm

equipoise, a tree trunk directly above one soldier becomes the fulcrum for balancing energies as the fiercely straining bodies choreograph themselves into extended monumentality. This powerful effect is negated, however, by the caption, “Gun Coming into Action in an Awkward Position”: the rhetoric invokes technological progress in a kind of descriptive language, but makes no reference to the struggling individuals in the frame, in a sense erasing their heroic effort.

Another attempt by the Dayal Studio to render a sense of spectacle is in a series of photographs documenting the polo matches between the Alwar and Jodhpur teams—according to reports the most exciting sports contest of the durbar ceremonies (fig. 106). These photographs are smaller in size and mounted more than one to a page. As a sequence, they look like a succession of action stills, having a filmic quality not found in other images in the album. With negative numbers in the 400s, they are in all likelihood cropped enlargements of other photographs, reduced in order for the



*Above*

- 106 **RAJA DEENDAYAL AND SONS**  
Jodhpur; A Hard Stroke: The Ball in the Air and Jodhpur  
carrying the Ball down the line (album page), 1903  
Silver Gelatin Prints, 125 x 208, 84 x 144 and  
86 x 140 mm respectively (Photographer's Ref: 433, 450  
and 451 respectively)

*Right*

- 107 **RAJA DEENDAYAL AND SONS**  
Jodhpur carrying the ball down the line, 1903  
Silver Gelatin Print, 86 x 140 mm  
(Photographer's Ref: 451)



resulting image to be as intensely focused on the action as much as possible (fig. 107). These images show the Dayal Studio trying to manipulate the photographic medium to achieve an effect more spectacular than the original image was able to convey. In the cropped image, the goalposts serve as framing or anchoring devices for the scene, and provide visually static objects to juxtapose the action of the horses and riders in motion. Reminiscent of Muybridge's experiments in motion photography, these Dayal Studio images attempt to reference new ways of recording events as seen at the 1903 durbar, specifically by the film camera.

A reporter in the *Bombay Gazette* wrote of the Delhi Durbar on 2 January, 1903 that the "dramatic effect" of the Imperial Proclamation being read in the arena to start the ceremonies "was broken by the whirring of a buograph [and] the presence of batteries of cameras and photographic machines [which] spoiled the artistic effect of a large section of the picture."<sup>19</sup> The buograph (also called "biograph") was an early device in the emerging motion film industry, and constituted a shift in the mechanisms of photographic documentation. The shift in ocular epistemology that it represents is a profound one and, despite an attempt to translate its qualities, still photography in the Coronation Album could not approximate the experience of witnessing an event in the same way as the new film technology could.

In the end, despite attempts to appeal simultaneously to the ritualised courtly domain of Hyderabad and to the modern tourist public, the Dayal Studio could not secure either as a source of patronage. As mentioned earlier, this led to a financial decline from which the Dayal Studio never fully recovered. The personal strain this caused can never be fully measured; following the 1903 durbar, a series of personal tragedies ensued. Deen Dayal's son Dharam Chandra passed away in 1904, and Dayal himself succumbed to illness in July 1905, only a few months after the death of his wife. One of his last letters, preserved in the Andhra Pradesh State Archives and clearly written with a shaky hand, pleads to the

Hyderabad government to settle payment on outstanding bills as the Studio was being "hard pushed on all sides" from their many solicitors.<sup>20</sup>

### Conclusion

The Dayal Studio's Coronation Album can be understood as a site of subaltern agency, not so much as a deliberate act of colonial resistance but rather as an object resulting from a completely different set of agendas from the domain of the native princes, rather than from embodying the intended meaning of the durbar as scripted by the colonial regime.

Despite the firm's success in using innovative visual strategies to manipulate, organise and mount the photographs in an album as a way to produce a counter-narrative, thereby pushing the boundaries of the photographic medium; the commercial failure of the album points to changed modalities of perception at the turn of the century that in turn reveal what were becoming increasingly recognised as photography's limitations. The growth of a discriminating viewership, alongside a growing segment of amateur and professional lensmen, marked a shift in seeing that demanded new modes of imaging and reproduction.

The Dayal Studio's attempt to recreate and simultaneously subvert the logic of spectacle, through visual strategies such as composition, organisation and selective subject matter, coupled with the close-up, the action-shot and the sequencing of stills to approximate moving imagery, ultimately fails to satisfy a tourist audience. Thus, a profound semiotic anxiety, generated by the inability to negotiate conflicting intentions, permeates the studio's carefully manipulated durbar photographs. Recursively triangulating between the instructions of patron, the commands of imperial overseer and the seductions of the machine (camera), the Dayal Studio may have failed in terms of both monetary investment and circulation of product, but the Coronation Album's unique visual cartography provides an important intervention within the fields of both history and photography in India.



## Notes

1. Research for this article was generously supported by grants from The Royal Ontario Museum, The Alkazi Collection of Photography, and the American Institute for Indian Studies. For feedback on earlier drafts, I'd like to thank Mark Cheetam, Elizabeth Harney, Deborah Hutton, Louis Kaplan, Elizabeth Legge, Jenny Purtle, and Allison Syme.
2. In 1903, the state of Hyderabad had annual revenue of 135 lakhs of rupees and covered an area of approximately 80000 square miles. See Stephen Wheeler, *History of the Delhi Coronation Durbar Held on the First of January 1903 to Celebrate the Coronation of His Majesty King Edward VII Emperor of India* (London: John Murray, 1904), p. 62.
3. Christopher Pinney, *Coming of Photography in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008).
4. A letter dated 31 October 1902 from Raja Deen Dayal & Sons to Faridoonji Jamshedji Esq., Andhra Pradesh State Archives (file inst. 30, list 2, s. no.191), states: "Raja Deen Dayal and his eldest son are at Delhi and his youngest son is travelling with the Viceroy's Suite". This indicates Deen Dayal was in Delhi preparing for the durbar from late 1902 onwards with Gyan Chand, while his other son Dharam Chand was traveling with Viceroy Curzon during the latter's all-India tour in the months preceding the durbar to gain support for the event.
5. The loose prints in the British Library do not have captions, but all have a Dayal Studio wet stamp on the reverse. None of these prints have negative numbers. This may be because they were originally from Curzon's own collection and he could possibly have received a set of images before they were given negative numbers; or the images may have been trimmed.
6. The Nizam and his party were seated in the front row of Block W, the second to the right of the dais. Wheeler 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
10. As stated in a letter dated 11 August 1903 from Raja Deen Dayal & Sons to Faridoonji Jamshedji Esq, Private Secretary to H.E. the Prime Minister, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (file inst. 11, list 4, s. no. 353). This letter follows a series of previous letters from the studio conveying a growing sense of anxiety, and urging the government to purchase more copies of the album.
11. Order dated 22 September 1903 from His Highness The Nizam's Government to Raja Deen Dayal & Sons, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (file inst. 11, list 4, s. no. 363) for "one superior full morocco bound Album of selected photos of Delhi Durbar 1903 in velvet case".
12. See order dated 22 September 1903 from His Highness The Nizam's Government to Raja Deen Dayal and Sons, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (file inst. 11, list 4, s. no. 363). See also a letter dated 9 November 1903 from Major Afsar Dawla to Mr. Faridoonji, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (file inst. 11, list 4, s. no. 363).
13. Wheeler 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 61.
14. *Ibid.*
15. "Delhi Coronation" in *Bombay Gazette* (2 January 1903), p. 5; Wheeler 1904, *op. cit.*, p. 43. See also Helen Rutledge, *A Season in India: Letters by Ruby Madden* (Sydney: The National Trust of Australia, 1976), p. 112.
16. Curiously, surviving prints do not have the deep tonal contrast that the Dayal Studio had come to be known for, suggesting a problem with the negatives during exposure or with the prints during developing. It would be impossible to determine why the images have a faded quality without further research.
17. Rutledge 1976, *op. cit.*, p. 95.
18. Wheeler 1904, *op. cit.*, pp. 177–78.
19. "Delhi Coronation", *op. cit.*, p. 5. H. S. Bhatavdekar, Indian portrait photographer turned filmmaker, and American Biograph company, were present filming Curzon's durbar. Histories of early Indian cinema mention Curzon's interest in the emergent photo-technology of film.
20. Letter dated 5 May 1905 from Raja Deen Dayal & Sons to Faridoonji Jamshedji Esq, Private Secretary to H.E. the Prime Minister, Andhra Pradesh State Archives (File inst. 11, List 4, No. 371).