



Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

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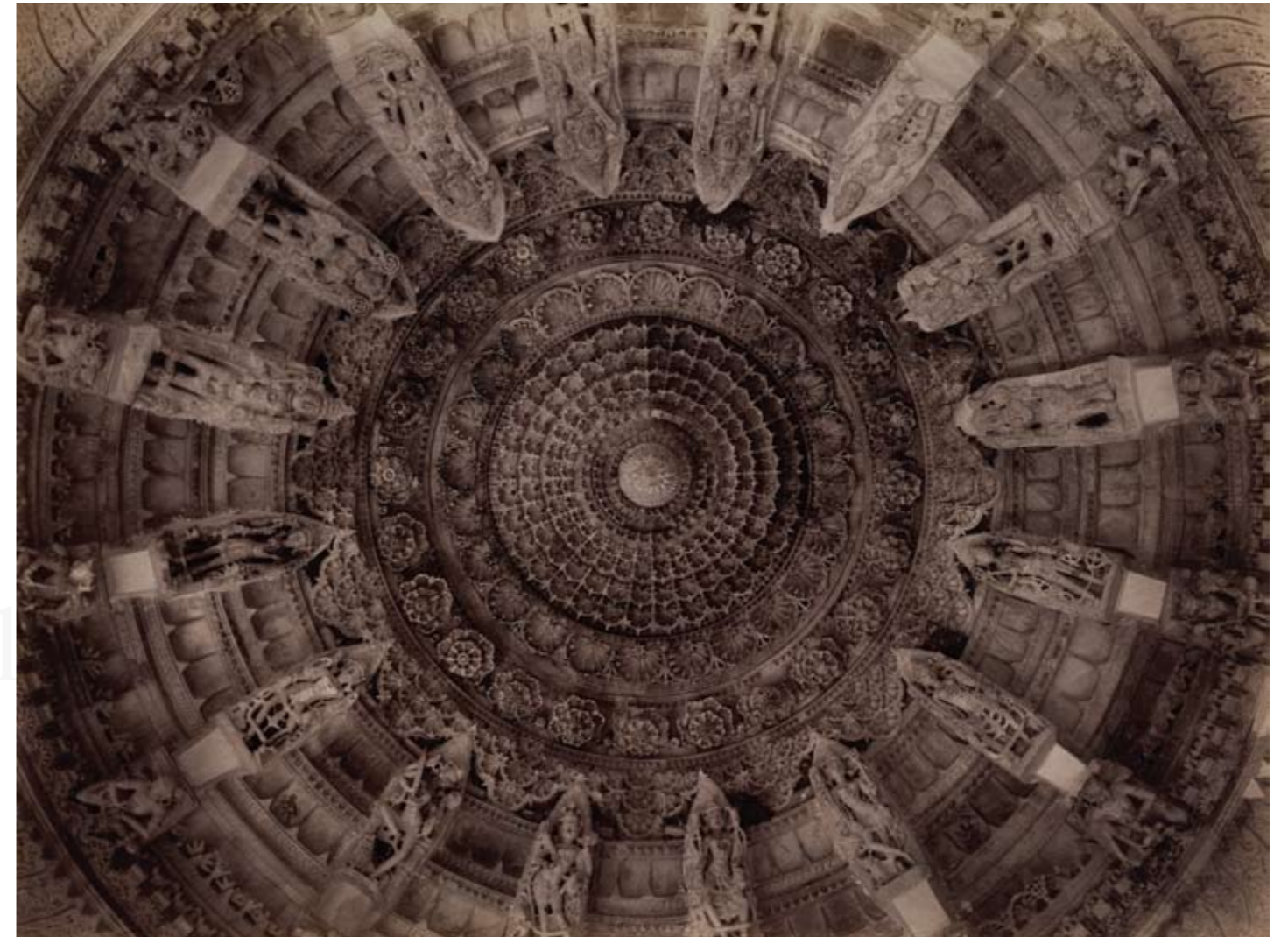
The Myth of Dayal: Rise of an Icon

In 2006, India issued a 500-rupee postage stamp in honour of Raja Deen Dayal (hereafter Dayal) (1844–1905) an action affirming Dayal's widely acknowledged status as the most celebrated 19th-century Indian photographer (figs. 1-2).¹ The stamp, an honour bestowed upon no other early South Asian photographer, exemplifies the iconic position that Dayal has come to occupy over the past three decades. The name "Dayal" now operates like a brand, signifying success, high artistic quality and the grandeur of princely India. In many respects, Dayal has become the example of the 19th-century Indian photographer par excellence in popular discourse. In fact, some scholars lament that the emphasis on Dayal has resulted in the virtual neglect of other Indian photographers of the period.²

The exalted status Dayal currently holds is not a mere by-product of historical selection: he was regarded as the premiere Indian photographer during his lifetime as well as newspapers of the time attest. He ran a successful business, and his Indore, Secunderabad and Bombay studios ranked among the top of the day in terms of size and repute. He had the honour of being appointed photographer to over a dozen high-ranking figures, including Queen Victoria, even though she never visited India and Dayal never left the subcontinent.³ His photographs won gold medals at various national and international exhibitions and, when Dayal died in 1905, his obituary ran in the major national newspapers of the day. The *Bombay Gazette*, in its account of his passing, praised Dayal as "the first great Indian photographer and artist."⁴

Previous pages

LALA DEEN DAYAL & SONS, SECUNDERABAD
Col. D. Robertson, Resident, with group of guests at Sas Bahu [Sahastrabahu] Temple, east of Gwalior Fort, 2 January 1895
From *Investiture of H.H. The Maharaja Madho Rao Scindia, Gwalior*
Albumen Print, Photographer's Ref. 13082, 208 x 299 mm
ACP: 95.0086-00004



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1 ♦ SANKHA SAMANTA
Commemorative Stamp of Lala Deen Dayal issued by Department of Posts, Government of India, on 11 November 2006
Photogravure, 45 x 35 cm each stamp
Courtesy India Post, Ministry of Communication & Information Technology, Government of India

3 ♦ DEEN DAYAL

Ceiling of Dilwara Temple, Mount Abu, c. 1882
Albumen Print, Photographer's Ref. 1191, 199 x 270 mm
ACP: 94.09.0002

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2 ♦ E. CRAIG, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER, RAJA DEEN DAYAL & SONS, BOMBAY
"Raja Bahadur Mussavir Jung" (as in Studio Register), April 1904
Silver Gelatin Print, Photographer's Ref. 29643, 133.3 x 95.25 mm
PEM: PH81.91
Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts



Between the mid-1870s when Dayal took up photography and his death in 1905, he and his studio produced more than 30,000 pictures. In addition to their sheer number, the photographs display an impressive breadth of subject matter, reflective of the many genres of 19th-century photography. Dayal's images range from masterful architecture views (figs. 3-4), to striking landscapes (fig. 5), to the documentation of military manoeuvres (fig. 44) and festival processions (fig. 46). His images chronicled the pomp of royal life, including lavish durbars (fig. 6) and big game hunts (fig. 93), as well as the essential work of the state, like railway construction (fig. 34) and famine relief efforts (fig. 7). Dayal captured the likenesses of British colonial officials, such as the Viceroy Lord Dufferin (fig. 8), Indian rulers, such as the Maharaja of Dhar (fig. 9) and the Nizam of Hyderabad (fig. 10), as well as visiting foreign dignitaries, such as the Grand Duke Alexander of Russia (fig. 88). Meanwhile, his three photographic studios produced scores of portraits of the late nineteenth century's growing upper-middle and merchant classes, including the well-known Tata family (fig. 11).

The uses of Dayal's photographs were as diverse as the subjects he captured. Many functioned as records of public works projects initiated by the colonial administration or as documents of cultural heritage within the boundaries of a princely state (see for example, fig. 35). These same images were compiled into albums and used as items of exchange within the courtly ritual of gifting. On the commercial side, many of the studio's photographs were available for sale as individual prints as well as mounted in ready-made albums. For example, customers wanting a souvenir of their travels in India could order individual prints, such as a Calcutta street scene (fig. 12) or the carved marble cenotaph from the tomb of Itimad-ud-Daulah in Agra (fig. 13), for 12

4 ♦ DEEN DAYAL
Teli ka Mandir in Gwalior Fort, 1882
Albumen Print, Photographer's Ref. 1339, 273 x 201 mm
ACP: 95.0086(40)

annas each for the first dozen and 10 annas each thereafter.⁵ Alternatively, they could purchase an entire album for Rs 50 to Rs 200 containing anywhere between 20 and 100 pre-selected photographs handsomely bound with an embossed leather cover. Gold lettering could be had for Rs 10 extra.⁶ In addition to being preserved in albums, Dayal's photographs were framed and displayed on end tables in drawing rooms of Indian palaces as well as British bungalows across South Asia (see for example, fig. 120). Many of the photographs displayed in homes were portraits; reprints mounted as cabinet cards could be ordered for Re 1 to Rs 2 each depending on the size.⁷ Simultaneously, some of Dayal's images, fulfilling the function of journalistic photography, were used as the basis for engravings in international news magazines such as *Black and White* and *The Graphic* (see for example, fig. 62). His photographs were placed in illustrated books on Indian architecture, were displayed at national and international exhibitions, and, as stated above, circulated as cabinet cards and *cartes-de-visite* (see Appendix A). They were reproduced on Christmas cards (fig. 61) and used as sources for large-scale oil paintings displayed in royal palaces. In this way, Dayal's photographs circulated in multiple overlapping discursive arenas of the late 19th century, including those of the colonial administration, princely India, the urban upper-middle class, international news media, and elite travel.

The ways in which Dayal and his work were viewed during his lifetime have left a legacy that to a large extent continues to frame current analysis; in many ways, the renewed interest in Dayal over the last 30 years or so derives from the elevated position he held during his lifetime. At the same time, this interest has been shaped by the recent intersection of several other key factors. First, his photographs, fulfilling the roles of historical documents, family mementos and art objects, survive in a range of places and continue to be reproduced in a variety of contexts. They can be found in scrapbooks stored in the back of closets of ancestral homes as well as in the archives of museums and libraries throughout