

History of Photography in Kumaon in Relation to India

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Abstract: The development of photography in the Kumaon in connection to India is examined in this article. The major British photographers who visited India and Kumaon are also covered in this article, along with their initial images taken there. It also includes historical photos made by locals, primarily the Sah community in the area, and the photography studios established in Kumaon. The main attractions were documenting the visual richness of its scenic rivers to the picturesque high Himalayan snowy mountains and valleys with lush vegetation. There is a need to document the rich Indian architecture of its temples, monasteries, forts, and works of art and natural history; and interestingly to the bejewelled and turbaned Rajas and Maharajas.

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Introduction of Photography in India

Introduction of photography as a subject in India and the past Indian photographers is well dealt with by Chaudhary (2012) and Panke, Tushar & Dhobley, Milind (2014), in which the authors have given chronological details of the evolution of photography in India during the colonial era and explored the initial uses of photography, profiled pioneering Indian photographers, and furthermore, highlighted the significance of understanding the evolution of photography in India for cultural heritage preservation. In this paper, the introduction of photography in the Kumaon region with the British photographers, who came to India and then migrated to the Kumaon hills and established studios along with their first photographs of the place and after them the local residents, mainly the Sah community of Kumaon, established photography, which is discussed in this paper. The British photographers reached India and found it an interesting locale, where the cameras could feast inexhaustibly, and also as a source

of income. Despite all, the main attractions were documenting the visual richness of its scenic rivers to the picturesque high Himalayan snowy mountains and valleys with lush vegetation; the ethnic diversity with its unique cultures and dresses; and, officially, the need to document the rich Indian architecture of its temples, monasteries, forts, and works of art and natural history; and interestingly to the bejewelled and turbaned Rajas and Maharajas.

The First British Photographers Who Worked in India

The photographers were attracted towards Kumaon, a region where they found ample scope of business by opening studios and taking scenic photographs of the lake and the Himalayas. The first Scottish-born army physician was John Murray, who introduced photography around 1849, while in the Medical Service of the Army of the East India Company. He brought much equipment and then required it for the photography with this unwieldy equipment; he produced a body of work documenting India's architecture that remained unsurpassed in the 19th century. The photograph of the Taj Mahal was first exhibited in London in 1858 by John Murray and he earned a lot of money by selling the copies of the photograph. After visiting and working in many places in India like Calcutta, Bombay, etc. He also moved to the Kumaon hills, an attractive place for every Briton in service. In Kumaon the main attractive place was Nainital, a recently established town with a beautiful lake and the Kumaon hills of the Himalayas. Kumaon hills were in his mind so he also reached Nainital and the Himalayas for photos for business purposes. Kumaon is regarded as an important region; before the British arrived, it was an independent state of India with a long history of its rulers, the Katyuri and the Chanda kings, who ruled Kumaon for more than thousands of years. When the Britishers arrived, it was under the rule of Nepalis (Gorkhas) for twenty years. The British defeated Gorkhas and Kumaon was under the British up to the independence of India. The people who live in the mid-region of this land in six (6) districts, viz., Udham Singh Nagar, Nainital, Almora, Champawat, Bageshwar, and Pithoragarh, are known as 'Kumaoni'

The first camera which was brought by the Britishers was a Field-camera was used for many years. This camera was used in the studio as well as in the field by the past photographers. There used to be a glass negative kept in a wooden cabinet. The shutter used to be used to be the cap of the lens.



Fig. 1: The Camera which was mostly used by the photographs in their profession. There used to be a glass negative kept in a wooden cabinet. The shutter used to be the cap of the lens.



Fig. 2: Location of Kumaon in the Map of India



Fig. 3: Map of Kumaon with Districts



Fig. 4: John Murray



Fig. 5: Photo of Taj Mahal by Murray, which were sold by him in England and possibly the first photograph



Fig. 6: Nainital by John Murray between 1860-1865



Fig. 7: The first Himalayan range photo was taken by John Murray from Mukteshwar region

The Second Eminent Photographer to Arrive in India, John Edward Saché

John Edward Saché arrived in the year 1860 and established a significant photographic studio in Calcutta in 1864, expanding throughout India. Saché's network included seasonal studios in locations like Nainital and Lucknow, capturing diverse subjects. By 1880, Saché had produced around 2000 views of India, showcasing his commercial success. He ran studios in Nainital (from 1867) and Mussoorie (from 1876) during the hot months and Lucknow (from 1871) during the cooler months. Between 1874 and 1876, he established further branches in Meerut, Kanpur and Benares, which he occupied for a few seasons only. With an increase in the European population – whether they resided in India or visited the country – the demand for photographic prints also grew. Saché is credited with taking some of the oldest known photographs of the Himalayas, including an 1870 image believed to be of Mount Trisul, visible from the Ranikhet area. But the author could not trace his masterpiece creation. However, the Indian photographer also took magnificent Trisul photographs.

Third Photographer in Kumaon

Dr. Kurt Boeck, a German ethnographer and photographer who travelled extensively through the Himalayas, including Garhwal and Kumaon, during the 1890s. He is noted for carrying heavy photographic equipment to altitudes of 16,000–18,000 feet to document regions like Badrinath, Kedarnath, etc. His work was not much publicized. He took a Badrinath photo in the year 1906 and one of the postmaster of Badrinath. He was an ethnographer, and during his fieldwork, he captured ethnographical studies of various places. The earliest image of Badrinath tells us that it was unclear which idol—Buddha or Vishnu—was housed in the temple. **Shah (1973)** provides a thorough discussion of this in his piece Badrinath: Vishnu or Buddha. When the Rohillas arrived at Badrinath, they actually threw the Vishnu image that Adi Shankaracharya had established, into the Naradakunda. In an attempt to replace it, the priest searched Naradad Kunda and found an antique Buddha idol. Rahul Sankratayan verified this. It is a Buddhist temple, which is why the Buddhist Society enquired. Later on, Vishnu was substituted for the idol. Thus, the debate came to an end.



Fig. 8: Badrinath temple shown only the gate of the temple rest portion deleted by Dr. Kurt Boeck in 1906

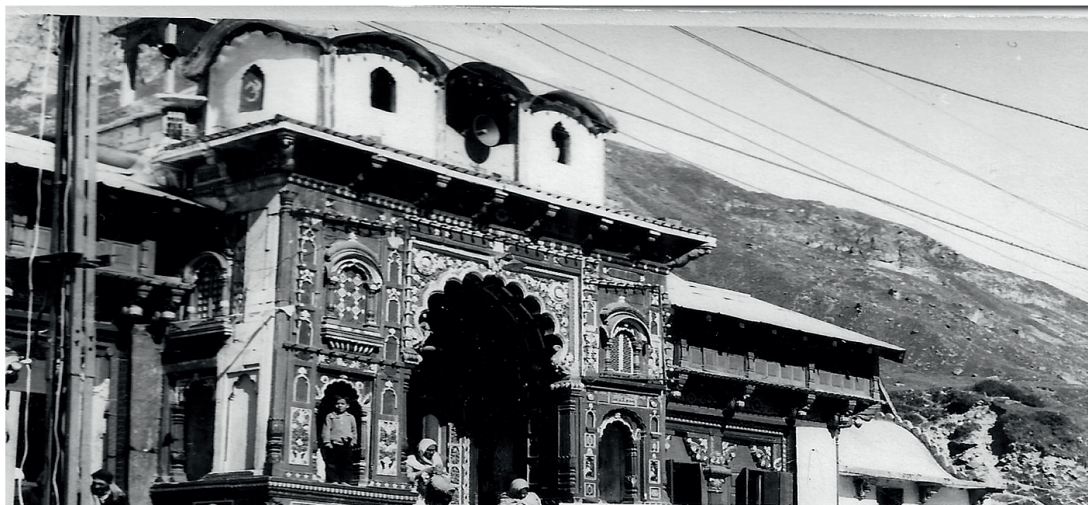


Fig. 9: The well decorated gate of Badrinath taken by the author in 1966

Photography at Nainital & Almora by John Murray

Photography in Nainital started with the advent of John Murray, who arrived before Sache in Nainital in the year 1860. Though the lake was established in the years 1843 onwards and up to 1857 it was inhabited considerably, and bungalows and cottages were established by the Britishers and the houses by local civilians. When John Murray reached Nainital, he took the first photograph of the lake. Then, Sache joined John Murray at Nainital and they jointly worked. After Sache went back to England. Then, O Malate also opened a studio in Nainital.

John Murray Photography at Almora

John Murray in the year 1860, also visited Almora, where he met the Ramsay, the Commissioner of Kumaon **Shah, (2017,38.)** and the treasurer of the government Sri Jai Sah, among the Indian friends

of Ramsay, **Shah. (2017,39)** and took his family photographs and his son photograph and his life size photograph, which was sent to England for coloring and enlarging. He also snapped the first photograph of Almora town.



**Fig. 10: Shri Jai Sah Thulgharia Khazanchi family in1860.
(Photographer John Murray 1860).**



Fig. 11: John Murray, who first visited Almora with a camera in 1860 with a field camera and took the family photographs of Jai Sah Thulgharia. And his life size photo which was sent to England for enlargement and coloring. (Photo: John Murray)



Fig. 12: First Photo of Almora houses in Khazanchi Muhalla. The small boy sitting is Rai Bahadur Chiranjee Lal Sah, at the age of 10 years, sitting beside his uncle in 1860. A copy of the same photograph was also in the family album of R.B.Chinrjee Lal Sah Thulgharia, in which this caption of the photograph was written: Photo: John Murray in 1860



Fig. 13. John Murray when visited Almora he also took a photograph of Almora in 1860

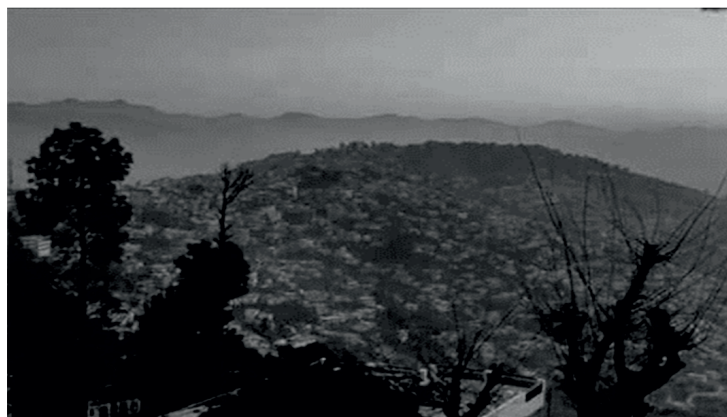


Fig. 14: About the same location taken photograph by Mr. Jagmohan Sah In the year 2023. See the increasing houses

The Second Eminent Photographer to Arrive in India, John Edward Sache

Sache reached India in the year 1865 at Calcutta. He had begun his career as a photographer in America. In Calcutta he opened the first commercial studio for an ever-increasing clientele for portraits. Later, he started his business in partnership with Hannah and Westfield. In the year 1869, he opened his studio in Bombay in partnership with John Colin Murray. John Edward Sache was one of the more prominent 19th-century European photographers in India. Like John Murray, he also took photographs of many monuments and locales of India. He worked in Bombay in 1869 and then with John Murray until 1870. During the 1860s, Sache ran his studios in Calcutta, Lucknow, Naini Tal, Meerut and Mussoorie with the partnership of John Murray. He used to make periodic visits to these places where he had established his studios. Apart from his studio work, he also travelled widely and in 1861 reached Pinari Glacier for the photography. His photograph taken in the year 1861 is the first photograph of the snout of the glacier. It is to be included that Colin Murray and Edward Sache both worked in Nainital and Kumaon taking the first and premier photographs of the places. He worked in Bombay in 1869 and then with John Murray until 1870. During the 1860s, Sache ran his studios in Calcutta, Lucknow, Naini Tal, Meerut and Mussoorie with the partnership of John Murray. He used to make periodic visits to these places where he had established his studios. Apart from his studio work, he also travelled widely and in 1861 reached Pinari Glacier for the photography. His photograph taken in the year 1861 is the first photograph of the snout of the glacier. It is to be included that Colin Murray and Edward Sache both worked in Nainital and Kumaon taking the first and premier photographs of the places.



Fig. 15: John Edward Sache (1822b.—1883d.)



Fig. 16: Rumi Darwaza Lucknow by Sache in 1868. Possibly the first photograph



Fig. 17: Photograph of Mallital Nainital by .Sache'sn 1868



Fig. 18: Nainital view before 1880 by Sache



Fig. 19: A view of Nainital after the landslide in 1880 by Sache



**Fig. 20: Pindari Glacier snout taken by Sache in the year 1866.
It is the first photograph taken of snout**

Duration of Sache in India

Sache lived in India only for fifteen years, and possibly he left India due to his ill health in the early 1880s and died in 1882 in England. Although a very successful photographer, he is remembered to have established commercial photography in India. Two of the photographs, which were taken in Sache Studio at Calcutta, are given below



Fig. 21: In the year 1865, Sache opened a studio at Calcutta and a photograph was taken of Budha Sah Salamgaria of Almora in 1870, who had visited Calcutta with his son, Mohan Lal for business purposes



Fig. 22: This photograph of his son Mohan lal Sah Salangaria of Almora at Sache studio, Calcutta in 1870 Indian photographers in Nainital, Almora and Ranikhet in Kumaon

After O Malate in Nainital, the Indian photographers, mainly Sahs of Kumaon, took interest in this business. The first was Gangi Sah, who had his studio at Ramsay Road, Tallital and he was the governor's official photographer and snapped the farewell parties' photographs of Government House. The second famous photographer was his brother N.L. Sah, who was a famous photographer who photographed the Commissioner of Kumaon. He had taken many historic photographs. He was called by the public on demand to Almora, Ranikhet and Haldwani. Among his historic photographs are the following: a historic photograph of a farewell to Percy Wyndham, Commissioner of Kumaon in 1924, **Shah,(2006)** and who was a close friend of Jim Corbett, the famous shikari of Kumaon (**Shah, 2008**).



Fig. 23. (a) A Baniya shop at Almora from Oakley's book (Photo M/S Nand Lal Sah)



Fig. 23 (b)- Parsi Sah, the photographer, is sitting in the middle with his brothers on the left.K.C.Sah, who was a Vaidya (Ayurvedic physician), is on the right with his brother, K.C.Sah. Photo taken at his Gari Parao studio, Mallital, Nanital 1895- 1900



Photo by Nand Lal Sah 1922 at Ranikhet

A Farewell party given to Harkision Lal Sah by the residents of Ranikhet on 3rd Dec. 1922.
Sitting on Chair starting from left. 1 & 2 (Unknown Military Officers)

3. K.N.Knox ICS, Asst. Commissioner Ranikhet.4 (Haji Niazahmad of Almora)

5. Rai Bahadur. Chiranjee Lal Sah, Almora) 6.Mr.F.C.M.Cruick Shannk,I.C.S. Deputy Commissioner, Almora.

7. Harkision Lal Shah author's Grand Father. 8. Lt. Col. W. Burton, Cantt. Magistrate, Ranikhet

9. Ghasi Ram, President of the Farewell Party, Ranikhet and 10. R.L.Nestor S.D.O.Pali,Ranikhet.11, Major A.N.S. Robert, Commanding, Dulikhet & 12. Dr. Lt. Col. W. Halaram RAMC stationed at Ranikhet.

In this photograph about hundred years ago the people living in Almora and Ranikhet and British officials then in administration are shown

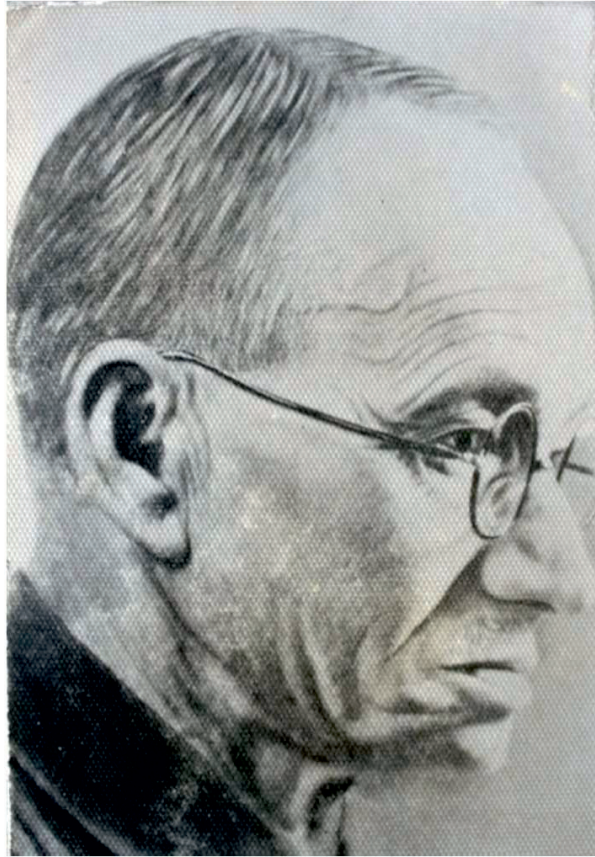


Fig. (24) Gangi Sah, the first Sah official photographer from Nainital. Photo courtesy : Eng. Kamal Kishor Sah



Fig. 25: A farewell party was given by the people of Kumaon to Percy Wyndham who served Kumaon from 1913 to 1924 as Assistant Commissioner and Commissioner. Sitting in Chair 2nd is Jai Lal Sah of Ranikhet 4th is R.S. Harkison Lal Sah of Ranikhet (author's grand father 6th is Percy Wyndham Commissioner Kumaon 7th is Cpy. Young, who captured Sultana Daku alive. Phot was taken in 1924 at Haldwani.

Standing behind the foreground collectrae officials.

(Photo M/S Nand Lal Sah)



Fig. b (25): N.L.Sah 2nd official photographer from Nainital, who featured many British and Civil prominent personalities of bygone days. Photo courtesy: Eng.Kamal Kishor Sah



Fig. 26. The day after the arrest of Sultana a party for jubilation was given by the people of Haldwani. The staff of the Police Duty Force were credited with arresting Sultana without firing a single bullet. Sitting on the Chair (Left to right) are an unknown official, Rai Bahadur Teerath Singh, Deputy Superintendent; Fredrik Young, Deputy Superintendent (in charge); and two others who are local persons of Haldwani, who hosted the jubilation party at Haldwani. Sitting on the ground are the sepoy; in front of Capt. Young, wearing a bo-tie, is Sri Puran Prasad Sah of Almora. Photo: Nanda Lal Sah, Nainital. 1928-29

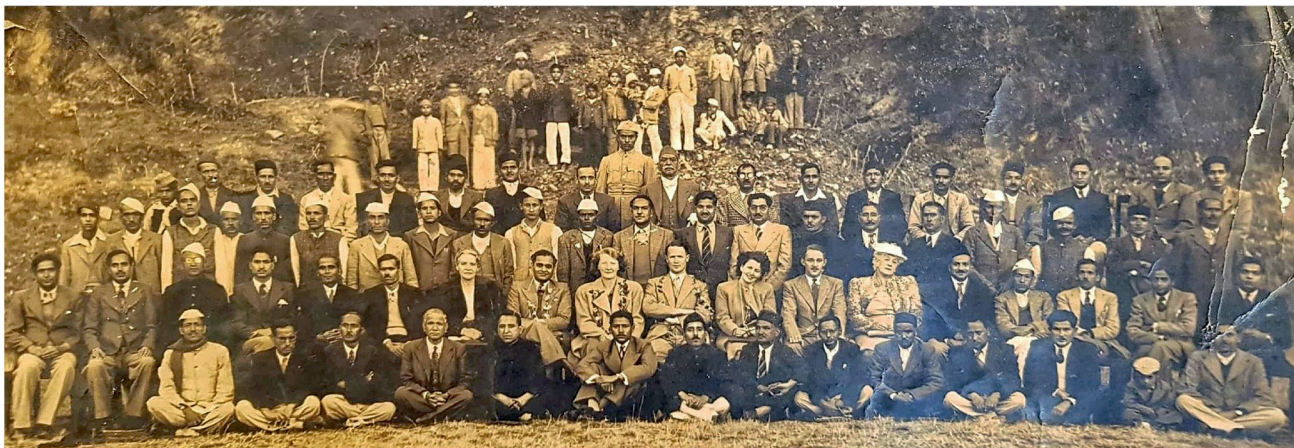


Fig. 27: A Farewell party to Last British Deputy Commissioner of Almora, at Ranikhet in 1947

Photo- Nand Lal Sah. This photo captures the main residents of Ranikhet before 1947.

**Sitting on Ground: 1st 2nd unknown 3rd Sri Chandra Datt Vakil, 4th R.S. Bhairab Datt Bhandari Vakil;
5th Mr. J.D. Waila, 6th M.C. Shah, 7th Bhola Datt Pandey Vakil & Ayurvedic Physician, 8th Himmat Singh Vakil**

**Sitting on Chair: 1st Principal National School, 2nd unknown, 3rd Purnannada Upadhyaya Vakil 7 Unknown 8th
Sri B.D. Bhandari 9th C.P. Gupta ICS Asst Commisioner Ranilkhet 10th Mrs. W.W.Finel 11th W.W.Finel ICS Deputy
Commisioner Almora 12th Mrs.Kelly 13th M.P.Kelly SSO Ranikhet. 14th Kelly's ther;
15th Sri Bihari Lal Sah Treasurer, rest unknown.**

**Standing next to Chair persons: 1st - 11th unknown seems to be Congress mens 12th Jai Ballabh Bhandari Vakil,
15th Sajjan Lal Sah of Almora; 16th Govinda lal Sah Ranikhet (RaiEstate) rest unkown**

**Last row: Standing: 5th Inder Lal Verma (teacher) 9th R.S. Bhawani Das Shah on his back his orderly;
12th Hirababhb Budhlakoti (Cantt board) rest are unknown.**

Later, after the death of Nand Lal Sah, his nephew Sri Ratan Lal Sah became the leading photographer for the business of scenic photographs of Nainital and the Himalayas. he made excellent photographs of these places, which were liked by the tourists visiting Nainital.

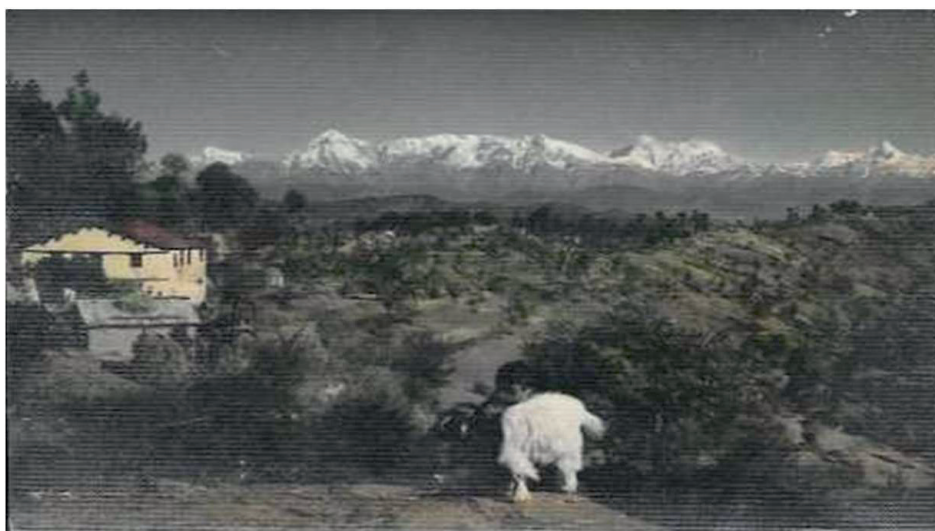


Fig. 28: The Himalayas from Chowkauri near Bageshwar were taken by Ratan Lal Sah in mid-1970

Photography in Almora

In the Early, 20th century L. R. Sah had also opened a studio in Almora, but he had to close it within 10-12 years. He undertook photography as an hobby and after taking his family photographs and making their enlargements, he closed his studio.

Photography in Ranikhet

Ranikhet was established in the year 1868 by the Britishers to be developed into a Cantonment for the British military troops as well as a hill station for their family members, **Shah (2022)**. There were two studios during 1870 one, Salisbury & Rhine, and the second, M/s O. Malate. In the year 1889, Lala Harkison Lal Shah Jagati (Author's grandfather) took training in photography with M/S Salisbury & Sons at Ranikhet and came to Lucknow for advanced training with M/S L.W.Clayton for three months. Then, he took up photography mainly as his profession as well as a hobby and opened a studio in Ranikhet for taking portraits of British families and military personnel. Side by side he also photographed his family members and made many big enlargements of them along with his brother Bhawani Das Shah Jagati, which are still exhibited in Ranikhet, in his family drawing-room.

Lala Harkison Lal Shah Jagati, who had worked as a Bazar Chaudhari in Ranikhet Cantonment, was an adventurous person. In the year 1911, he visited Pindari Glacier in a party and took the heavy field cameras and other heavy types of equipment and also took the photograph of the Pindari Glacier and its snout.



Fig. 29: HLS own photograph taken in his studio at Ranikhet in 1897



Fig. 30: HLS also took his mother's photograph with his youngest brother Kundan Lal Shah of Kalika Estate in his own studio in 1903



1919 Front Row L. To R. - Rai Sahib Harkison Lal Shah, Rai Bahadur Chiranji Lal Shah, Rai Sahib Bhawani Das Shah & Back Row L. To R. - Kudan Lal Shah, Lt. Moti Ram Shah, Sitting - Navin

Fig. 31: In his own studio a photograph was taken in 1918. From Left: HLS (himself).KundonLal Shah his youngest brother and his maternal- uncle Rai Bahadur Chiranjee Lal Sah of Almora (in centre) and his 3rd brothers Moti Ram Sah and 2nd brother Bhawani Das Shah

Mr. Harkision Lal Shah made many big enlargements of the photographs of his family members, which are still exhibited in Ranikhet, in his family drawing-room. In the year 1911, he visited Pindari Glacier in a party and took the heavy field cameras and other heavy types of equipment like camera stands, negative cabinets, etc. He took the first photograph of the Pindari- glacier and its snout. During those days handling of the photographic equipment was not so easy; the cameras used to be heavy and negatives consisted of fragile and delicate big glass plates covered inside a light-proof wood cabinet. And this equipment, along with chemicals, trays & dishes, used to be imported from London and used to be handled with caution. The exposure to the photographic negative plates used to be given by removing the lens cap by hand, which required experience with perfection so that correct exposure could be given.

The big dark rooms used to be equipped with some big developing trays & dishes and with a source for sunlight to be used, usually the ceilings with a closing and opening technique so the source of light could be manipulated for the enlarging equipment for enlargement and the exposure of the printing cabinet. The photographs used to be black & white or sepia-toned. Some photographs, usually the portraits or family groups, after printing were coloured by photo-colours to look more attractive and colourful, and such photographs costed more. Since HLS Bros were also in other businesses, they gradually left this business of photography. The other famous photographer of Ranikhet Was Abdulla Khan Photographer, who had his branches at Ranikhet & Bareilly.



Fig. 33: HLS with his freinds at Ranikhet. Photograph was taken in 1910-12 by Abdulla Khan



**Fig. 34: The family group of HLS with his brothers, sons, and nephews
(Photo taken by Abdulla Khan photographer) 1925**

Standing: His sister's son Lt. Bhawani Das, Lalit Chandra (son of Lt. Moti Ram) Jagdish Ch. (his 5th son) Gauri Lal (3rd son) Bishambhar Lal his eldest son, Kundon Lal his youngest brother, Devi Lal his 2nd son, Basant Lal, Nabin Ch. and Lt. Moti Ram his 3rd brother **Sitting on Chairs:** Rai Sahib Harkision Lal and Bhawani Das his 2nd brother. and in the centre Mahesh Ch. son of Bhawani Das. And, his pet dog, Great Dane.

After Abdulla Khan, the next photographer who emerged in Ranikhet was A. Hussain, Photographer of Ranikhet (1930-1948). Hussain worked for only 18 years at Ranikhet as a Studio photographer. He used to photograph the Britishers, who used to come to his studio in Sadar Bazar Ranikhet. He was a master in taking the Himalayan-view photographs; his photographs of the Himalayas were unparalleled to those taken by any British photographers. In his studio, he used to keep the background curtain of Himalayan scenery. He made a beautiful photograph of Mt Trisul like John Sache.



**Fig. 35: A .Hussain Photographer Raanikhet
Hussain's some artistitic Himalayan photo graphs being shown as under:**



Fig. 36: Kalika Estate, near Ranikhet



Fig. 37: The Himalayas from Ranikhet



Fig. 38: The Himalayas from Riuni near Ranikhet



Fig. 39: Himalyas through standing crops



Fig. 40: Himalayas from Kausani

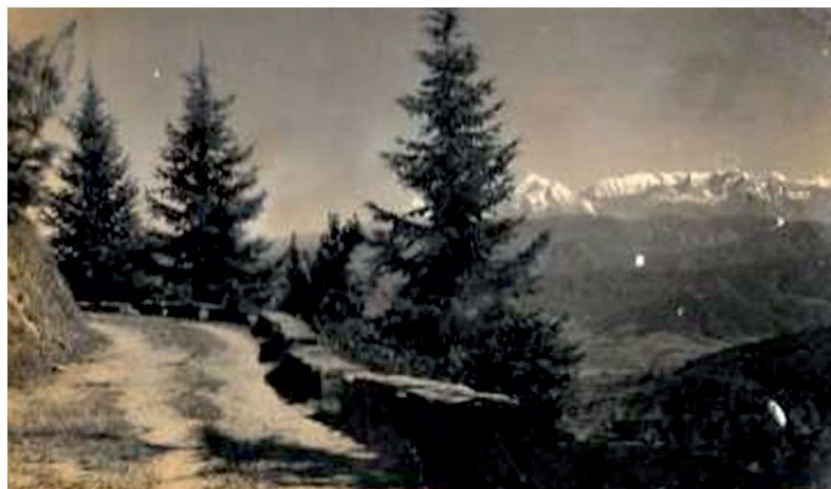


Fig. 41: From Kausani see the composition



Fig. 42: Solitary Mt.Trisul from Kausani



**Fig. 43: The author of 8years of age sitting in a doka
At Pinari Glacier Photo- A.Hussain 1944.**

The author regrets to say the photographs of Hussain are in bad shape, even though they reflect the artistic taste of the photographer in composing the scene.

Discussion & Conclusion

In order to protect and preserve the well-known images of Nainital, Almora, and Ranikhet for future generations, this study piece attempts to document the historical photos of

Kumaon taken by the British and Indian photographers. These photographs have preserved not only the places but also the people living in this region, if the names were available. John Edward Sache reportedly attempted to record the views of Mount Trisul that could be seen from Ranikhet. The author attempted to obtain a copy of these, which are reportedly kept in Getty's museum, but was unable. Instead, he sought to chronicle the images taken by other photographers, and he was successful in doing so with the new Mt Trisul photograph from Ranikhet by A. Hussain photographer. This article has been successful in recording the changes in the architecture of the Badritnath temple taken by Dr. Kurt Boeck in 1906 and the recent ones and also the changes in landscapes in Almora by comparing the past photos and present photos, showing the increasing number of houses with the increasing population. In conclusion, it is vital to locate old photos of any significant residential area from websites and other sources and compare them with more recent ones to identify any changes that will be crucial for the area's future development.

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