Photographic histories of postcolonial India: the politics of seeing (and unseeing)

Photographic Histories of Postcolonial India:
The Politics of Seeing (and Unseeing)

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work presented in this thesis is my own.

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Date: 31st August 2022

Abstract

The postcolonial momentum around nation-building, along with the transnational sentiment on decolonisation and development ensured a rhizomatic use of the photographic medium in India in the 1950s and 1960s. Considering the enormous production and dissemination of repetitive, mundane and largely unspectacular official photographs in state archives, and national and transnational bureaucratic networks, this dissertation is a focused study of the photographic vision of the postcolonial state. At a time when the nation was riding high on utopian futuristic aspirations, curating and managing 'optics' was central to the formation of the new nation and the consolidation of the postcolonial state. To add to this, an increasingly insecure Cold-War context and an emerging transnational network formed by seeing (and hiding from) each other, constantly interrupted and constituted the state's optical frame. The chapters explore photography as an expansive medium beyond the photograph-photographer binary and attempt to write histories situated in the functional presence of photography within the exhibition space, in official albums and archives and diplomatic exchange. In doing so, the dissertation interrogates the postcolonial state's caste-blind modernity and displacement-led development from a critical subaltern lens, puncturing official projections which have had the power to dictate the optics of inclusion and exclusion. This dissertation argues that there is value in complicating photography's relationship to seeing, deconstructing its evidentiary potential and questioning photographs as historical knowledge, to write a history of seeing and unseeing through the photographic medium. This dissertation contributes to postcolonial writing, photographic histories and visual culture studies, by attempting to reformulate our ways of seeing and unseeing through the 'language of rights', thereby asking questions about knowledge and power embedded into the photographic vision.

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Abbreviations

NMML   Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi

NIA   National Archives of India, New Delhi

PSI   Photographic Society of India, Mumbai

BBMB   Bhakra Beas Management Board, Chandigarh (also has an office in Nangal)

PPMI   National Union of Indonesian Students

GPII   Indonesian Islamic Youth Movement

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Introduction

Image 1: Anon., Budhni Mejhan with Nehru at the Panchet Dam, photograph, December 06, 1959, NMML, New Delhi.

Budhni Mejhan, a young woman from the Santhal tribe, was one of the contracted workers on the construction of the Panchet Dam in the eastern part of India in the 1950s. This Dam, when it was being

built, was one of the biggest dams in the Damodar Valley Corporation Project (DVC).[1] Budhni, around fifteen years old, was invited to initiate the Dam operations, making her the first labourer to inaugurate a dam in independent India.

The photograph shows three figures–Budhni pulling the lever, Nehru standing behind her pointing outside the frame, as if directing her towards a distant vision; and behind Nehru is a man in a coat, whom we could see as a representative of the larger bureaucratic network which threw its weight behind him. Placed right at the centre of this frame, Budhni's arm is glistening under the flashlight. Her arm pulling the lever is the central movement within the frame, and yet the viewer is distracted by Nehru's towering personality and his raised finger. Major Indian newspapers are known to have carried this photograph hailing the new nation's promise of social empowerment. The image of Budhni pulling the lever, accompanied by Nehru (literally) directing her, was used to signify India's forward march in the period after 1947.

However, much like postcolonial India's aspirations, this story was about to be jolted by a reality check. After the inauguration, when Budhni went back to her village Karbona, the news of her sharing the stage with Nehru and garlanding him at the inauguration had spread. As per the local Santhali customs in her village, the act of garlanding Nehru was symbolic of marriage, and she was in effect, married to Nehru. Since Nehru was not a Santhal, she was ostracised by her community for violating the customary rules. According to Chitra Padmanabhan, three years later in 1962, she was fired from her contractual job at the DVC. Her story resurfaced in the public domain twenty years later, when she travelled to Delhi to meet Nehru's grand-son and then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, asking to be reinstated to her job at the DVC.[2] Recently in 2019, Budhni's story was again picked up by writer Sarah Joseph who published a fictional novel based on her life.[3]

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[1] The DVC, partly built on the Tennessee Valley Corporation model in the United States of America, was established in 1948 as the first multipurpose river valley project of independent India, under the joint supervision of the Central Government and the State Governments of Bihar (later Jharkhand) and West Bengal.

[2] Chitra Padmanabhan, 'Recovering Budhni Mejhan from the stilted landscape of modern India,' *The Hindu*, February 01, 2021. Accessed February 27, 2022, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/recovering-budhni-mejhan-from-the-silted-landscape-of-modern-india/article12846589.ece

[3] 'Writer Sarah Joseph Finds Woman Banned by Tribe in 1959 for Garlanding Nehru Still Alive,' *The Newsminute*, August 02, 2019. Accessed February 27, 2022, https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/writer-sarah-joseph-finds-woman-banned-tribe-1959-garlanding-nehru-still-alive-106583

In 1959, this image was used by the newspapers to represent the inclusion of a labouring Santhal girl, in defining the optics of India's developmental future. However, in the later years, the connotations around this image changed. The same image became proof of Budhni's association with Nehru, a tragic turning point in her life, and a sign of postcolonial India's failed promises. Steve Edwards notes the use of photography to "recharge perception".[4] Through the years, this image has been a part of changing perceptual fields and has defied attempts at categorisation.[5]

I bring this image to raise two concerns that are central to this dissertation. First, how do we engage with official photographs, found in bulk, within the state archives? The postcolonial period with its strong emphasis on the image of the welfare state employed photography for various purposes. Of course, the state used photography and film for propaganda, defined as 'pedagogic training' for its word-illiterate mass of citizens. But should we see photography only as an indexical tool for the state, employed to 'see' and 'show' itself and its citizens? Using photographs found in state archives and official publications (primarily but not always), this dissertation is an attempt to engage with these photographs from a critical subaltern lens, to expand and complicate the contours of the state's photographic vision. In doing so, I rethink existing historiographies of photography and offer an alternative approach to writing about archival photographs. Photographic reproducibility ensured that often the same photograph, such as the one above, was selectively chosen from a giant archive, used and reused multiple times, within changing perceptual fields, often to make contradictory claims. Through this dissertation, I argue that photography's intersection with state-making can be found in its messy ubiquitous, almost unnoticed presence, in its ability to be coloured by each context and ideological frame that it was a part of. In a way, this malleability of the photographic medium perpetually situated photography at the edge of state control, never quite fitting in nor fully subversive.

Narratives that seek to understand the viewing conditions generated by the postcolonial situation often focus on the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial as a distinctive marker. By highlighting the multiple forms and uses of the *photographic medium* within state institutions, this dissertation chooses to go beyond *the photograph*, situating the photographic vision of the state, as a product of its overlaps

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[4] Steve Edwards studies the work of Soviet Constructivist Alexander Rodchenko to highlight the use of photography as a modernist medium to alter perception. Edwards, 'Photography and Photomontage in the USSR and Germany', 406.

[5] Additionally, this image has also been used by right-leaning websites in recent times, to accuse Nehru of having multiple wives, adding to thriving false propaganda about his Islamic lineage.

with non-state and transnational agents. This dissertation seeks to further complicate the definition of emergent photographic vision by investigating its internal absences and contradictions.

The second concern is – how was photography employed to create an image of a nation-in-making? In the years after independence, the photographic medium strongly intersected with a strong futuristic drive. While classical forms like dance and folk arts were used to reconstruct an ancient past for India,[6] forms like architecture, films and photography were often employed to construct a future.[7] The photographic medium was used to construct a developmental future with enchanting images of big dams, mines, heavy industry, and engineering feats. While the *present* revolved around Budhni and millions like her who toiled in the process of 'building' up the nation, the state (represented by Nehru and the man behind him in the above image) was busy directing towards an unseen distant *future*, away from the actual point of action in the present.

Sankaran Krishna talks about the postcolonial nation-state's logic of endless spatial and temporal deference where the nation is put into an endless loop of 'becoming Indian' through a dynamic, future-oriented process.[8] The postcolonial emerges as a gestation period; "the postcolonial present", he notes, "is…eternally suspended in a space labelled a transition."[9] Throughout the dissertation, I will draw on this element of suspension embedded in an aspirational future that has 'not yet' arrived and needs constant work to reach there. The futuristic drive was essential post-1947, as Srirupa Roy notes that "the state was presented as the key agent in this process of national becoming; a new, sovereign state, that, unlike its colonial predecessor, could be visibly shown to undertake activities that were ''truly representative'' of the Indian people."[10] The anti-colonial discourse of the nationalists in the colonial

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[6] On classical dance and the invention of the postcolonial nation, see Thobani, *Indian Classical Dance and the Making of Postcolonial National Identities*.

[7] Referring to magazines like *Marg*, *Design*, *Indian Builder* and the *Journal of Indian Institute of Architects*, which focused on the themes of architecture and nation-building in the 1950s-60s. The role of the Films Division of India in constructing an image of the postcolonial nation has been discussed earlier. Photography also played a role in constructing the future. However, its employment in constructing an ancient past is also significant. See archaeologist Sudeshna Guha's work in Guha, 'Archaeology, Photography, Histories'; Guha, 'Photographs and Archaeological Knowledge'; Guha, 'The Visual in Archaeology'. In this dissertation, I will be looking at photography's connection to the future.

[8] Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood*, 15:17.

[9] Ibid., 21.

[10] Roy, *Beyond Belief,* 38.

period was "superseded by longings for the future".[11] Photography intersection with this longing for the future and several images I study in this dissertation are situated in a temporal future, addressed to a future spectator, who is yet to see the developmental journey of India. While acknowledging the nationalist underpinnings of this futuristic drive, I also want to note the transnational connotations of this desire rooted in the decolonising momentum across the world. Going further, I will attempt to complicate the idea of the 'nation' by drawing on postcolonial transnational associations – the national and the transnational, both linked to a forward movement, a new future.

The Making of the Postcolonial State through Optical Metaphors

First published in 1998, James Scott's *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, is a brilliant analysis of high modernist development ideas in its interrogation of the statist attempts to organise, make legible and standardise the ones it governs, imposing order on otherwise disorderly subjects. These attempts, according to Scott, were rooted in an imminent failure and ended up intensifying state repression. My research draws on the foundations of Scott's work for the manner in which he uses the metaphor of vision to study state-making practices, building from a broadly subaltern epistemological position. Scott brought up a fundamental question – how do states (high modernist, authoritarian and stable) see the populations (and landscapes) they govern? And how are these modes of seeing entwined with practices of knowledge production and state-making? In a way, his work pointed out that a state becomes 'The State' by introducing a (new and different) way of *seeing*. While Scott refers to 'seeing' and 'vision' as broad metaphors for governance, I am using his analysis to specifically discuss photographic seeing and photographic vision.

Srirupa Roy notes that scholarship that studies mass mobilisation strategies as a way of nation-state formation and anticolonial impulses possibly misses out on acknowledging the gigantic presence of state power.[12] Agreeing with her suggestion to take state presence more seriously, my research is an attempt to study statist ways of seeing, especially when it was the producer (collector and disseminator)

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[11] Ibid., 50.

[12] I am using the categories 'nation-state' and 'state' interchangeably to refer to the postcolonial state and its vision, drawing from Srirupa Roy who argues that post-1947, the nation and the state were simultaneously formed, through conjoined processes of "nationalising the state", and "institutionalising the nation". Roy, *Beyond Belief*, x.

of an expansive photographic and filmic vision in this period. In doing so, my dissertation finds resonance in the work of Peter Sutoris who has elaborated the aesthetics of developmental state vision engendered through the Films Division documentaries.[13] Roy's book, *Beyond Belief,* also looks at the nation-state relationship manufactured through the construction of a statist vision. Atreyee Gupta similarly argues for the ocular nature of postcolonial development and highlights its technocratic aesthetics of order and clarity seen across different modes of visuality.[14] Building on Roy and Sutoris' work that has delved into the filmic vision of the postcolonial state through Films Division documentaries. I intend this dissertation to be seen as supplementing their work, placing the peculiarities of photographic seeing by the state (and its absences), into the broader histories of photography, official visual culture, and postcolonial state-making in India.

Klausen has noted the centrality of "the state" in Scott's work such that even the *view* from the margins is oriented towards the central state.[15] This criticism, although valid, is not relevant to my work as I consciously and methodologically place the state at the centre, spotlighting it in order to interrogate it. Reworking Klausen's argument in line with Srirupa's suggestion, I intend to place the state at the "front and centre", making it "too" significant for my reading, as a conscious political strategy to unpack the postcolonial ways of seeing.[16] Chapters two, three and four bring in photographs found in state archives and official publications.

Scott's 2009 book *The Art of Not Being Governed* expands his earlier work to explore how the state is seen by its subjects. Chapters one and three in this dissertation discuss instances of photographic production outside state authorship. I bring in these non-official photographs to explore the intersection of the photographic medium with state-making exercises outside and beyond official institutions and publications, assuming that these non-official photographs self-reflexively illuminate and expand state vision and all that it represses. In a way, to use William Hurst's words, my research uses non-state

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[13] There is a growing scholarship on the Films Divisions as a governmental institution that constructed vision. Sutoris, *Visions of Development*. Roy, 'Moving Pictures The Films Division of India and the Visual Practices of the Nation-State' in *Beyond Belief*, 32-65; Kaushik, '"Sun in the Belly"'; Jain, 'The Curious Case of the Films Division'; Dadawala, 'The Films Division of India and the Nehruvian Dream'; Kishore, '"You've Told Me That Three Times Now"'.

[14] Gupta, 'Modernism's Ocular Economies and Laconic Discontents in the Era of Nehruvian Technocracy'.

[15] Klausen, 'Seeing Too Much Like a State?', 479.

[16] Ibid., 483.

photographic production to explore state vision through a "reversal of the reversed gaze".[17] In other words, I use the subject's way of seeing their state as a window into the state's ways of seeing (and unseeing).

My understanding of the state builds on scholarship that sees the postcolonial state as an intervening presence with a strong mandate for the future. I draw on Sudipto Kaviraj's suggestion that we should see the postcolonial state for its disembodied regulatory presence[18] and Partha Chatterjee's proposition to see the postcolonial state through its 'Planning' function.[19] Both encourage an understanding of the postcolonial state through its functional interventionist presence as opposed to administrative and bureaucratic existence. This approach ties in with Scott's analysis of the state as an active intervenor in constructing (optical) legibility. In this dissertation, the postcolonial state is understood as an interventionist developmental actor that could channel momentum in favour of resource re-allocation, restructuring landscapes and re-marking the identities of its citizens. Seeing the state through its Planning function, also makes its futuristic drive evident. The photographic medium with its technocratic heritage was embedded in the construction of a developmental future, not just in India but in several postcolonial nations of that period. I am also influenced by the Gramscian idea of the state as *relational*, where the focus is not only on state apparatus but also on the modalities of state power. Gramsci's well-known definition of the state sees it as a complex of practical and theoretical activities to justify and maintain the domination of ruling classes and win the active consent of those ruled over.[20] The state thus emerges as a result of its relation to the cultural and political spheres.

Finally, to address the most common ground of criticism of Scott's 1998 book, also acknowledged by him in a recent revisitation of his work, is to note that even when I use the term state and vision throughout the dissertation, there is indeed no single, uniform vision of the state. There are incoherencies and contradictions between how different state institutions, their employees and policies interact with civil society and cultural groups. Together, they constitute a complex, fissured vision. My approach to addressing this fissured vision is to examine a different photographic form in each chapter,

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[17] Hurst, 'Reflecting Upon James Scott's Seeing Like a State', 499.

[18] It is important to note that his essay is from the mid-2000s, after the defeat of BJP-led Hindutva in the 2004 general elections. Kaviraj, 'On the Enchantment of the State'.

[19] The role of the Planning Commission as an extra-political arm of the state was essential in constructing the "self-definition of a developmental state embodying the single universal consciousness of the social whole". Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State'.

[20] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks,* 244.

hoping that each new set of photographic materials discussed here brings to light a new, facet of the state. State vision then emerges, drawing on Gramscian thought, through a series of encounters with different photographic forms and mediums. For instance, chapter one looks at the image of the postcolonial state that emerges through a photographic exhibition produced by the intellectual-artistic networks of the 1950s-60s in Bombay, and chapter two situates the state in the photographic voice of a group of PWD engineers working on a rural reconstruction program, chapter three encounters the state through the photographic archive of a giant dam building project and finally chapter four constitutes the postcolonial state through its transnational exchanges explored through the diplomatic photo-album.

The Photos Division as the Official Archive: Defining Postcolonial State Vision

After 1947, several central and state bodies were constituted for the state to showcase itself to the public. Prominent among these were the Films Division and the Photos Division. The former was formulated in 1948 as an extension of an already existing colonial enterprise, with the aim of "encouraging and promoting a culture of film-making in India".[21] Today, the Films Division headquarters in Mumbai houses a collection of their documentaries and feature films, digitised and made accessible to researchers through an online catalogue listing over seven thousand films made by the Films Division to date.[22] While there is increasing scholarship in recent times that looks at the official documentaries produced by the Films Division, much, in contrast, there exists little to no scholarship on the Photos Division in Delhi.

The Photos Division was set up in October 1959[23] as "an independent media unit meant for visual support for the varied activities of the Government of India…and the biggest production unit of its kind in the country in the field of photography".[24] It was meant to bring together several existing institutions

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[21] From the official website, https://filmsdivision.org/about-us.html

[22] Online catalogue of over seven thousand films, https://filmsdivision.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Catalogue-for-Web-Site-compressed.pdf. At least until the pandemic, their office hosted a large research room with individual computers allotted to visiting scholars to browse their collections.

[23] It was called 'Integrated Photo Unit' – IPU until the early 1960s, when it was renamed as Photos Division.

[24] From the official website, http://photodivision.gov.in/about.aspx

such as the photo studio of the Publications Division and the Photo Unit of the Press Information Bureau (PIB) & Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity (DAVP), keeping in mind "the importance of the medium for right projection of the development of the country and also keeping in view of eliminating the duplication of the activities".[25] Thus, right from its inception, the Division's role in projecting a statist vision of development and functioning as an administrative institution, not merely photographic or documentarian, was made clear. While the institutional lineages it brought together had colonial roots, the formation of the Photos Division as a separate entity devoted to the curation of photographic vision was an enterprise of the postcolonial state.

The official website of the Division reveals its multiple roles. Photographic documentation of "the growth, Development and the political, economical (sic) and social changes in the country" for posterity remains only one of the many objectives. Apart from that, the Division essentially acts as a site for storage and distribution of photographs, by providing "still visuals" to the media units of the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and other Central and State Government Agencies, Ministries/Departments including the President Secretariat, Vice-President Secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha Secretariats, and Indian Missions abroad through the Ministry of External Affairs. Its significant clients are the External Publicity Division of the Ministry of External Affairs which uses photographs for publicity of the Government of India outside the country, the PIB which uses photographs for press purposes, and the DAVP which seeks the Division's support for the production of exhibitions and advertising materials that eventually have a viewership across the country.[26]

Apart from assisting the internal governmental machinery, the Division also gives photographic prints to non-publicity organizations and the general public through its "Pricing Scheme".[27] Commerce is thus another important function. Today, the Photos Division office primarily functions as a site to sell photographs to other state departments or publishers looking for illustrative image. The office is so constructed that there is no allocated area for researchers wanting to spend time familiarising themselves with the diversity and range of photographic material in their collection. Access to the photographs is

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

[27] A Digital Photo Library is in the process of being established. The official website mentions making the collection digitally accessible. However, at the moment, only recent photographs of the ministers and official events are visible on the website. It is not clear if the entire digital collection from 1959 will be open for research access or only for internal viewing and purchase.

only through a single master computer monitored by the Photos Division staff, restraining access to the researchers wanting to personally browse their collection. In my personal experience, I was asked to 'tell' the staff member what images I want from their collection. When I explained to them that I could not tell them what I want unless I saw the range of photographs they had, because my research was not about looking for particular images of one event as an illustration, but to get a sense of the work of Photos Division in its early years, the staff was dumbfounded. As explained to me by the Chief Photo Officer (in 2019), Photos Division has no provision of unrestricted researcher access and therefore a prohibition on the researcher's access to their collection. In the end, we agreed that due to the special nature of my research, they would be 'willing to show' more photographs, but wanted to know the specific topics I was interested in. When explained that I would like to see Bhakra Dam, Bhilai Steel Plant and possibly photographs of industrial development and modernity, I was told that this was too broad. Bhakra Dam in itself was the subject of thousands of photographs in their collection. The staff informed me that because their role was to 'sell' photographs, I was expected to pay (for viewing) per photograph. Since that would not be possible, as a 'goodwill gesture', they would let me access the 'lowest quality digital print' of no more than fifty photographs of the Dam for 'free'. My experience as a photo researcher phenomenologically informs my understanding of the Photos Division as a site marked by censorship and restraint of access.[28]

Saidia Hartman asks if it is possible to exceed or negotiate the constitutive limits of the archive. For her, the answer lies in "advancing a series of speculative arguments and exploiting the capacities of the subjunctive (a grammatical mood that expresses doubts, wishes, and possibilities), in fashioning a narrative, which is based upon archival research". She pushes for "a critical reading of the archive that mimes the figurative dimensions of history", that tells "an impossible story" and highlights "the impossibility of its telling".[29]

Picking up on her claim that "the loss of stories sharpens the hunger for them",[30] in this dissertation, I will try to look for photographic stories hidden in the state archives, interrogate some photographic absences, and bring new photographs to complicate the stories told through photographs in the state archives. I see this approach as a way to expand the limits of the photographic vision of the postcolonial

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[28] Partly, this could be attributed to their lack of experience with the possibility of research on photography and not seeing the public importance of the collections they house. But there also exists a state-imposed limit on how the photographs can be accessed and by whom.

[29] Saidia Hartman, 'Venus in Two Acts', 11.

[30] Ibid., 8.

state, juxtaposing what lies within with what lies outside, what is missing, repressed, and ignored. The dissertation intends to create a sort of *counter-archive*, that expands state vision to include the liminal space just beyond it, integrating what lies hidden and suppressed. Counter-history, according to Gallagher and Greenblatt, "opposes itself not only to dominant narratives but also to prevailing modes of historical thought and methods of research".[31] I hope the method of engaging with photographs in this dissertation will present an approach that illuminates the impossibility of state control on photographs, while simultaneously revealing its desperate attempts to control public vision. Building on Hartman's suggestion to use the *subjunctive* as a way of exploring the limits of archives, I will attempt to read the photographs in state collections in a manner that complicates their truth value and ruffles the boundaries of fact, evidence, possibility, and aspiration.

Allan Sekula notes that one way of "taming" photography's circumstantial and idiosyncratic presence is by turning it into the typical and the emblematic through-

> *a machine, or rather a clerical apparatus, a filing system, which allows the operator/researcher/editor to retrieve the individual instance from the huge quantity of images contained within the archive. Here the photograph is not regarded as necessarily typical or emblematic of anything, but only as a particular image which has been isolated for purposes of inspection.*[32]

Sekula's formulation of the archive as a site to discipline the subversive possibilities of photography is a useful reference as it shapes my reading of the Photos Division's bureaucratic apparatus. File records reveal the emergence of the state as an active agent in curating a photographic archive. In 1948, the duties of a Photographic Officer (originally in the Publications Division) included supervision of the Photo Section, dark room work and collection of photographs. Within a decade, when the Photos Division was constituted in 1959, the post of Chief Photo Officer (CPO) was created to look into the administrative work, as well as offer supervisory guidance to the technical work. Besides this, a Photographic Officer was appointed to assist the CPO as well as to "supply (sic) suitable captions" for the photographs. By the 1960s, captioning became a separate role, distinct from photographing and editing. Records reveal a discussion on whether or not photographic work should be an essential job role for the Photographic Officer. However, the then CPO of the Photos Division, T Kasi Nath, did not consider it necessary to include photographic work as essential for recruitment in this role. In addition to the captioning work mentioned above, the role of the Photographic Officer was expanded to include

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[31] Gallagher and Greenblatt. *Practicing new historicism*, 52.

[32] Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', 17-18.

maintenance of the photo library, liaison with outside agencies for the acquisition of photographs and a responsibility to collect photographs for use in governmental publications.

This changing nature of photographic work from 1948 to 1961 also reveals the intent and purpose of setting up the Photos Division. The Division enabled the state to use the photographic medium for purposes more than mere photographic documentation of its activities. Its diversification of photographic work into collecting, archiving, and distributing enabled the state to consolidate its photographic vision, thus becoming an active agent in the formation and suppression of photographic knowledge. The gliding pay scales within the Division defined those doing merely photographic documentation (Junior and Senior Photographers) as 'junior' to those involved in administrative work (Chief Photo Officer and Photographic Officers). This gradation of pay scale also suggests that the role of being the archival repository of state vision was gaining precedence with the passing years, so much so that photographic labour was relegated to a secondary status. Interestingly none of the photographs in the Division's collection is credited to individual photographers. When I enquired, the staff informed me that this was a protocol to ensure all the photographs are government photographs. In any case, it was possible that several people may have worked on the same photograph, including but not limited to the photographer, darkroom technical assistant, captioner and editor. Keeping the photographs anonymous was one way of claiming joint authorship of their work. Anonymity could also be another mark of state vision, which seeks to erase all signs of heterogeneity in favour of a homogenous statist vision, under the singular authorship of the state.

In 1962, the Photos Division had a staff of twenty-four Class I and Class II officers, besides several Class III and IV employees[33]. The two Class I posts included the CPO (T Kasi Nath) and the Photographic Officer (Harbans Singh), who reported to the CPO. Besides these two, a range of Class II jobs included two Assistant Photo Officers, fifteen Photographers, two Junior Photographers, two Technical Assistants and one Administrative Officer. The nature of their work included covering various internal delegations visiting India, photographing important dignitaries on their tours of India, accompanying the Prime Minister, Vice President, and Deputy Prime Minister on their official visits in India and abroad, supply photographic coverage to government reports, exhibitions and so on[34]. Besides

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[33] The Union Public Service Commission of India (UPSC) is in charge of making appointments for central government jobs in public service. The posts are hierarchically graded according to Class I-IV, with Class I being the highest rank.

[34] File 8/52/63 – Pub at the National Archives, New Delhi.

photographic documentation, administrative and managerial work included assisting the DAVP in making slides, providing colour transparencies and photographs for their posters, advertisements, and exhibitions, heeding requests for blow-ups and big-size photographs, converting cinema slides and transparencies into colour prints suitable for exhibitions and posters, keeping up to date with photographic documentation on "plan projects, flora and fauna, people, costumes and monuments, handicrafts, handlooms and places of tourist interest..", helping the PIB send photographs to the Foreign Press, and assisting in the making of colour photographic albums for the visiting dignitaries. The administrative nature of work expected from the staff of the Photos Division illustrates that photography was employed by the state for more than just seeing. The ambition to create an archive as a way of knowledge production and postcolonial state-making discloses an expanded definition of photography which encompasses a curation of vision, thus complicating photography's claim to *see*.

While the Division aspired to take on the role of a centralised 'filing cabinet', the movement of its employees suggests that the production of the state's photographic vision effectively emerged collaboratively in relation to non-state sites. File records reveal that appointments within the Photos Division were made from the DAVP, PIB, Ministry of I&B, state governments or from within news photographers and studio photographers outside government institutions. For instance, Photographer F M Mukherjee worked in PIB and the Information Directorate in Lucknow, UP, before joining the Photos Division. Photographic Officer Harbans Singh was working with the Department of Agriculture, Government of Punjab before his appointment by the Publications Division of the Central Government, from where he moved to the Photos Division. Tarachand Jain was a Photographer and Artist in the Social Welfare Department of the Rajasthan Government, later appointed as a Technical Assistant in the Publications Division before being promoted to work as a Photographer in the Photos Division. Kundan Lal who was appointed as a Photographer in the Photos Division came from the news industry with seven years of experience as a staff photographer with *The Tribune* in Lahore before Partition. Post Partition, he continued as a staff photographer with *The Indian News Chronicle, The Times of India,* and *The Illustrated Weekly of India* (a well-known photographic magazine) before working in the Photos Division. R D Luthra was running his photographic studios in Delhi before joining the Division[35]. T Kasi Nath himself had five years of work experience as a press photographer for *Deshbandhu* magazine, as a part-time lecturer in photography at the Delhi Polytechnic college and was a member of the *Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain* since 1945, the *Photographic Society of America* since 1947 and the *Photographic Association of Bengal* in 1950[36]. Besides, he was an

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[35] File related to the permanency of Class I and II officers in the Photos Division. See File 8/21/62 – Pub, Ministry of I&B, at the National Archives, New Delhi.

[36] File 8/70/61 – Pub, at the National Archives, New Delhi.

established pictorialist by the late 1950s, regularly exhibiting in several national and international photographic exhibitions and connected to the photography club culture. Between 1960-61, he also received government-sponsored training in colour photography at the Kodak Laboratory in London, and the Geavert and Agfa factories in Belgium and West Germany respectively. This movement of photographic staff within and outside the state institutions reveals the porous boundaries of the state's photographic vision and its extension to several non-state spaces. These non-state spaces such as the magazines, newspapers, studios, and colleges where the Photos Division staff trained before taking on their role as managers of the 'filing cabinet', together formulate an expansive terrain for what we can understand as state vision. No work exists on the government photographers of that period, and it would be interesting to know how their practices in private jobs such as newspaper agencies and photo studios shaped their work within the Photos Division.

To sum up, in the two decades after Independence, the central government under the aegis of the Photos Division consolidated its photographic vision, expanding from being a mere documenter into the role of an archive, a 'filing cabinet'[37] involved in the collection, storage, liaison and distribution of photographs. The diversification of photographic work further served to consolidate the idea of a homogenous state vision that thrives on the erasure of individual authorship. The boundaries of this state vision were porous as photographic staff often moved into the Division from different non-state sites, lending credence to the Gramscian theory that the state (and its photographic vision) emerges in relation to non-official sites. This section has attempted to define the postcolonial state's attempts to consolidate a photographic vision through the formation of the Photos Division. Seeing the Division's work as an archive that uses the photographic medium to construct the knowledge of the state to its people and of the people to the state, I have also attempted to suggest the role of censorship in suppressing knowledge by the state. Further chapters will build on this idea of the postcolonial state as an active agent in the formation and suppression of photographic knowledge.

1947 and After: Nation. Partition. Photography

In some ways, much of the photographic material discussed in the dissertation and sites chosen to study in each of the chapters are taken as illustrative of grander ideas of development, nationhood, and

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[37] Reference to Allan Sekula's use of the term, which will be further explored in chapter three. See Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive'.

modernity. In this regard, Fredric Jameson's argument of seeing 'third world' texts as a 'national allegory', is useful to my work.[38] While Jameson studies literary texts, this dissertation studies photographic 'texts' and explores their allegorical references to the postcolonial Indian nation, especially in specific instances like the photographs of Gandhi's death discussed in chapter one, or certain popular Bhakra Dam images discussed in chapter three. Chapter two also uses a 'privately' made album to study the very 'public' discourse of development politics in the context of rural reconstruction programs. In doing so, I allude to Jameson's argument that the private and public spheres are not distinct in these photographic *texts*.

However, Jameson sees the potency of these allegorical texts through the prism of nationalism, a term he uses to refer to the consolidated resistance of the colonised people to their structures of oppression. Aijaz Ahmad criticises Jameson's use of 'nationalism'. I agree with Ahmed's suggestion that the multiple collectivities included in the term 'nation' make it a nuanced category to work with, as opposed to the ideology of 'nationalism'. Seeing the 'nation' as a site of contradictory impulses allows us to reframe it as the product by relations of production, rather than merely through a "unitary 'experience' of domination by a colonial power" is useful. A similar argument is articulated by Aloysius, in his preference for the category of the 'nation', which for him represents the 'people' and their contradictory and collectivised impulses, as opposed to an elite ideology of anti-colonial nationalism. In agreement with Ahmad and Aloysius, this dissertation prefers using the term nation, over its ideological variant - nationalism.[39]

Besides, the category of the 'nation' also allows me to adopt a cartographic lens and probe the underlying territorial anxieties. Independence from colonial rule, through a bloody partition of South Asia, meant that the 'nation' and its territorial stability, became powerful rhetoric in the years after 1947. Ted Svenson reminds us that independence (from colonial rule) arrived *through* the partition, allowing us to reframe 1947 through conjoined frames of independence and partition.[40] Seeing 1947 and the period afterwards through this perspective, I intend to situate the forward march of the nation in the backdrop of the partition and resulting instability.

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[38] Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism'.

[39] See Ahmad, *In Theory*, 102. Also, Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*.

[40] For a detailed study of what Independence meant in the wake of an ongoing partition, see Svenson, *Production of Postcolonial India and Pakistan: Meanings of Partition.* Similar arguments are made in Pandey, 'Partition and Independence in Delhi'.

Partition induced a long-term state of anxieties produced due to low-intensity conflicts. A significant work in this context is Sankaran Krishna's account of cartographic anxieties, which talks about the process of defining the territorial expanse of the new nation and redrawing its borders in the postcolonial period. This territorial insecurity was a feature of the broader postcolonial anxieties across the world, as argued by Krishna.[41] This element of postcolonial anxieties beyond national boundaries will be addressed in chapter four which delves into global alliances and photographic exchange in the time of nation-building. For now, I want to explore the anxiety induced by the partition internally, through a discussion of two photographers within the Photos Division.

Sarvashri R D Luthra and Kundan Lal were partition refugees, appointed as government photographers in February and December 1954 respectively. Luthra worked at the Khanna Art Studio in Lahore in 1940 in the portraiture and retouching section before moving to become a press photographer with *Delhi Express* and *Associated Press Photos (Delhi)* where he stayed until 1952, eventually joining the PIB. In October 1959, he was transferred to the Photos Division (then, the Integrated Photo Unit). At the time of his appointment, Luthra did not have documentary proof of his birth date. However, he was appointed for a temporary contract on account of his status as a displaced person from West Pakistan. A record of his works lists his role as a cameraman for the Chinese Cultural Delegation between December 1954-January 1955.

Kundan Lal had a similar story. From 1940 onwards, Lal worked as a staff photographer for *The Tribune*, Lahore (1940-47), the *Indian News Chronicle* (1947- 1949), *The Times of India* (1950- 51) and then the *Illustrated Weekly of India*, Bombay until he applied for a temporary post of the photographer at PIB in 1954. As the official documents suggest, Lal was recognised as a 'displaced person' from Sialkot, West Pakistan and therefore allowed to apply for the temporary post of a photographer in the PIB despite being over the age limit. From December 1954 to February 1956, Lal intermittently worked on two hundred and fifty-eight assignments at the PIB, where he was deemed 'good' in his coverage of 'static' subjects. His work records include a temporary appointment on the Publicity for the Community Projects and the National Extension Service, as a Class II Gazetted Officer with a salary scale of Rs. 350-25-500.

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[41] Krishna, 'Cartographic Anxiety: Mapping the Body Politic in India'.

Both Luthra and Lal, despite fulfilling all other conditions of permanency, were continued on a temporary work post for years after their initial appointment. Their requests for permanency were refused as they did not have documentary proof of their birth dates. The archival records reveal Lal's efforts to persuade the Registrar of the Punjab University in Solan (India) and the principal of Murray College in Sialkot City (Pakistan) to offer him a duplicate copy of his matriculate certificate giving evidence of his year of birth (1909) as he had lost the original certificate from the Punjab University in Pakistan, where he studied.[42] These official records can be read in multiple ways, all of them equally valid and useful in helping us complicate the trace of partition in the Photos Division office, and more broadly in the construction of state vision of the post-colonial state. Both Luthra and Lal came from families who survived the partition violence. As reiterated time and again in their official requests and appeals for permanency, the reason for them not being able to furnish documentary proof of their birth was that it was lost during the riot circumstances that forced them to leave their ancestral homes for Delhi. These photographers, employed to formulate state vision within and through the Photos Division, were involved in photographing the making of post-colonial India. Their efforts to secure jobs within the Photos Division reveal how traces of the partition, and its aftermath were simultaneously present in the manufacturing of the official vision by the Photos Division in the 1950s and the 1960s.

The official records reveal a discussion on the ways to bypass the need for a document that proves their date of birth. One way suggested was to consider their date of birth as mentioned in the History of Services of officers holding gazetted appointments in the Government of India, maintained by the AGCR (Accountant General Central Revenues). The photographers, in contrast, offered to submit their horoscopes as their birth proof. This offer was endorsed by Kasi Nath who wrote a letter in August 1965, supporting Lal and Luthra's efforts to prove their date of birth through alternative channels such as the horoscope. The higher echelons of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, however, did not seem very amused by this possibility and threatened to terminate Lal and Luthra's temporary contracts if they were unable to furnish documentary proof of their date of birth. As a desperate plea against being dismissed, Lal wrote a letter explaining his efforts to retrieve his proof of birth from the Punjab University, "I am a refugee from West Pakistan and settled in Delhi after the partition. I lost all my belongings including my documentary evidence relating to my school certificates during the partition." His letter, however, does not just paint him as a victim of the partition and ensuing bureaucratic hassles, but also as a patriot and a believer in the welfare state. He suggests that he left his job as a press photographer in a reputed photographic magazine with a basic salary of Rs 750, to take

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[42] File 8/52/63 - Pub in National Archives, New Delhi.

up the more "honourable and secure" job of Government service, "with the idea of better facilities which I would enjoy in my old age".[43]

In a similar letter, Luthra also foregrounds his status as a refugee photographer demanding a more welfarist approach from the state. His letter reads, "During the partition of the country may (sic) of us left our hearth and homes under very peculiar circumstances leaving behind not only our landed properties and valuables but much of our personal effects (sic) also to save a much precious thing, our life!". Unlike Lal, Luthra said that he had managed to "salvage" his BA certificate which could be used to deduce his date of birth if required, thus pushing the welfarist character of the state to bend its rules and adopt alternatives. Luthra further explains his efforts to produce his matriculation certificate from the University of Punjab and laments that his requests to the University were never answered. He also mentions getting in touch with his long-forgotten friends in Lahore, who approached the University on his behalf, only to be told that the records of matriculation exams in 1933 were not available. Like Lal, he also offers his horoscope as an alternative proof of birth, again implicating the state to display its welfarist nature and find ways to bend the rules and accommodate the refugees in their system. At the end of his very evocative letter, Luthra reminds that he gave up a lucrative studio business to join the Photos Division when requested by Mr D Handa (previous officer-in-charge of Photos Division, who was succeeded by Kasi Nath). "I am a god-fearing man with three children to support and still loyal and conscientious worker in my OLD AGE (sic)", he writes.

While the partition was deemed a traumatic event that the state tried to push away from public imagination,[44] the aftermath of it – the refugee crisis, the lack of housing, etc - became a site for the state to enact its welfare toward its new, now refugeed citizens. Both Luthra and Lal, were photographers who chanced upon their Photos Division jobs through the violence of partition and went on to become important agents in formulating postcolonial India's vision of itself and its citizens. Records reveal their struggle to be accepted as permanent employees of the state institutions, while simultaneously revealing their efforts to push the postcolonial state to broaden its rule book and enact its welfarist projections. The photographic vision of the state encompasses the disturbances produced due to and through the partition, as well as the spectacle of the faltering state unable to stand by its welfarist image. The photographers, as agents involved in formulating the postcolonial photographic vision, are divided selves - looking out to the citizens and the developmental projects they were sent

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[43] File 8/21/62 – Pub in National Archives, New Delhi.

[44] Referring to file records in National archives which discourage showing images of partition violence in government displays, owing to unhealed wounds in public memory.

out to photograph, while looking back to the state institution which hired them, pointing out its inadequacies and inefficiencies in protecting the welfare of refugees. Photographic vision produced by the Photos Division and similar state government institutions was thus complicated by the state's desire to project a vision of a new India while being haunted by its own inadequacies in providing welfare in the post-partition period. As refugee photographers uprooted from their ancestral homes, Lal and Luthra look towards their Photos Division jobs as a potential source of stability, thus emerging not just as victims of partition but also as active citizens pushing the state to look at itself and devise alternative ways to accommodate the refugees, thereby living up to its own projection of being a welfare state.

Problematising the Postcolonial Lens

The gaps in writing histories of photography, and more broadly art, in the Indian sub-continent, are deeply linked to the silences in nationalist historiographies. To bring Ranajit Guha's old but still relevant criticism here, the historiography of Indian nationalism has been dominated by colonial-elitism which foregrounded British writers and institutions as the main protagonists; and by bourgeois-elite nationalism built on the assumption that the anti-colonial struggle was an idealist, exercise sprung from the goodness of the native elites who led the people of India from subjugation to freedom. Guha highlighted the ideological oversight of such historiographies, pointing out that it fails to acknowledge the "contribution made by people".[45] This criticism of nationalist historiography can also be a criticism of nationalist photographic (and more broadly, art) history writing in India.

Sanjukta Sunderason argues that the majority of writing on art history and modernity in the Indian context has prioritized "retrieving figures of modern art from non-western contexts to counter the Eurocentric canons of modernism". These art historiographic accounts have focused on individual genius and biographical modes of knowledge production.[46] The scholastic rigidities and elite

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[45] While Guha and other earlier subaltern writings emphasise the 'autonomy' of the subaltern, I don't want to go that far with my claims. My intent here is to stick with the questions posed by the earlier subaltern writers before the turn towards seeing subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism. Some of the questions Guha, Sarkar, and Aloysius raised about nationalist historiography can be particularly productive in critically examining the gaps in nationalist art historical (and photographic) writing. Sarkar, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies'; Aloysius, *Nationalism without a Nation in India*; Guha and Chatterjee, *The Small Voice of History*, 186–93.

[46] Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics: Modern Art and India's Long Decolonization*, 3–4.

institutional roots of art history as a discipline possibly push art historians to look at established artists, their oeuvres and institutional patronage and networks to write any history of art in India.[47] Photography, by virtue of being an 'outsider', whose roots are located in more democratic networks (discussed in chapter one) is at an advantage as it opens up the possibility to explore histories beyond individual authorship or creative 'genius'.

In this dissertation, I intend to look at photographic material through the critical scholarship on nationalist historiographies. Aloysius, in his book *Nationalism without a Nation,* launched a radical critique of the nationalist historiography including the more critical subaltern school. He argues that several writings by the subaltern school have seen caste as a local problem, not as an essential fault-line across different subalternities in India. With a lack of focus on culture-specific subalternity, caste is often reduced to the lens of discrimination (largely restricted to untouchability) and atrocity. This automatically leads to an assumption that once the discrimination and atrocity are 'managed', the problem of caste will be eliminated. While Aloysius's argument is specifically caste related, it becomes a useful frame to study the problems in postcolonial historiography that have influenced most histories of art and photography in India. Postcolonial historiographies have situated the fundamental contradiction in the experience of colonialism, drawing the focus away from divisions endemic to India.[48] For instance, Partha Chatterjee argues for a distinction between the material West and its spiritual colony as a way to detach the colonised subject from the derivative discourse of the West and restore its agency.[49] However, as Sumit Sarkar suggests, this understanding obliterates the differences in the 'colony' that arose from indigenous patriarchal structures of domination, anti-caste mobilisations

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[47] I am referring to Sonal Khullar's work exploring modernism and national identity through the works of Amrita Sher-Gil, Maqbool Fida Hussian, K G Subramanyam, Bhupen Kakkar. See Khullar, *Worldly Affiliations*. Karen Zitzewitz's fascinating analysis of the secular-modern also remains tied to five artists. See Zitzewitz, *The Art of Secularism*; Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*. I also want to note art historical scholarship that has engaged with the history of modern art outside this biography mode. Saloni Mathur has studied the formation of 'India' for the western audience. See, Mathur, *India by Design*. Geeta Kapur problematised the temporality of the 'modern'. See, Kapur, *When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India*. Sunderason 's work explores the art history of the postcolonial period through left cultural solidarities. See, Sunderason, *Partisan Aesthetics*; and Atrayee Gupta studied modern art through a network of state institutions in her PhD dissertation. Gupta, *The Promise of the Modern: State, Culture, and Avant-Gardism in India (ca. 1930-1960).*

[48] After Guha's initial observations on the absence of the subaltern voice from nationalist historiography, later writings of the subaltern studies group, as Sarkar notes, moved away from the diversity of subalternity in India to situate the 'subaltern' in the colonial versus colonized divide. Sarkar, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies'.

[49] Similar logic is seen in Dipesh Chakravarty's work on Indian modernity. Chakrabarty, 'The Difference'. and Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*.

and heterodox religious sects outside of the Hindu fold, projecting subaltern as untouched by power other than colonialism.[50]

Aijaz Ahmed, in his critique of Jameson's essay, notes that situating a society solely in terms of its 'experience' of colonialism is another form of 'Othering', reducing the postcolonial Indian nation to being a product of western historical processes. Such an approach is reductionist as it homogenizes widely disparate historical processes and resulting experiences. While Neil Lazarus' reading of Jameson tries to revive the historical materialist grounds of Jameson's 1986 essay,[51] the questions opened up by Ahmed's critique are significant. Colonialism was not a singular experience. While not going to the extreme of postmodern subjectivity, it is clear that the dynamics of patronage, land-holding patterns, caste divide and gender imbalances were some of the significant factors that determined how the historical experience of colonial rule was integrated within the making of postcolonial India.

Histories of photography, developed through postcolonial scholarship that is not receptive to the structural contradictions within India, ends up producing narratives that unquestioningly accept colonialism as a central frame to understand the postcolonial vision. Inspired by Guha, Ahmed, Sarkar and Aloysius' work, this dissertation seeks to locate the contradictions within the Indian society, asking questions that expose the internal fault lines, instead of seeing the photographic material through the lens of colonialism alone.

Lazarus notes that the 'postcolonial' was originally a periodising term,[52] only to be given an ideological shift by the work of Homi Bhabha and others during the 1980s and 1990s. While I do use the word 'postcolonial' in this dissertation, my use of the term is primarily to indicate the time period – after the British officially left India. Further, my use of the term is situated within the questions raised by Guha, Ahmed, Sarkar, and Aloysius which can be used to reconstruct 'postcolonial' as the position of an ex-colony with respect to its internal fragmentation and culture-specific fault-lines. The post-colony is in this sense, a divisive location, which offers a fragmented perspective of development and modernism – the key ideas discussed in this dissertation. My attempt is to ask questions that look up to these ideas from the perspective of the 'people', as Guha says, but also to see this category of the 'people' as

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[50] Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*; Chakrabarty, 'The Difference'; Chakrabarty, 'Nation and Imagination'. Sarkar, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies', 410-13.

[51] Referring to Lazarus, 'Fredric Jameson on "Third-World Literature"'.

[52] Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 11.

fundamentally 'divided', as Aloysius points out. Each chapter in this dissertation poses questions from this perspective, in hope that cumulatively these questions will illuminate a set of viewing conditions that can be termed 'postcolonial' in their location. I anticipate that a photographic exploration of postcolonial vision through a fragmented perspective *from below*, that is inclusive of the continuities with the colonial and the pre-colonial experience, could be a fertile ground for postcolonial photographic writing in India.

As Eric Hobsbawm notes "most histories in the past were written for the glorification of, and perhaps the practical use of, rulers."[53] In contrast, the *Many-Headed Hydra* describes a history from below as a history of connections. I am using 'from below' as a broad epistemic position that allows me to use critical subaltern readings, especially those informed by an anti-caste ideology, to raise questions about the dominant projections of the postcolonial state. I am particularly referring to Ambedkar's political writings, Ranajit Guha and Sumit Sarkar's writing from the subaltern school and G Aloysius and Kancha Ilaiah's anti-caste critiques of postcolonial nationalist historiography. 'From below' in this dissertation is not a photographic representation of the subaltern, but a subalternist *method,* a lens of looking at state photography, encouraging reflections on what is missing, suppressed, and omitted from the official photographic vision; further drawing on Hartman's suggestion to read official archives in ways that allow us to access these suppressions and omissions and Sekula's invitation to explore archives through subaltern subjectivities[54].

A relevant work here is Daniel Rycroft's excellent essay linking the photographic capture of Birsa Munda's image to his physical capture by the British in alliance with the missionaries in the Chotanagpur region, leading to his death. Birsa Munda (1875-1900) was an anti-missionary, anti-diku (Indian non-indigenous outsider) and anti-British revolutionary freedom fighter from the Munda indigenous community in central India, who was captured by the police for his resistance to the colonial administration. Before his untimely death in the British jail, the police/missionaries took photographs of him, which now remain his only images in public circulation. Rycroft draws on Spivak and Ranajit Guha's work in subaltern studies, to reinscribe political agency to Birsa Munda's image taken in captivity. His approach is to use 'conjecture' as a way of reading official archival photographs in order to excavate its subaltern subjectivities, thereby reclaiming the political legacy of Birsa Munda and

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[53] E.J. Hobsbawm, 'History from Below Some Reflections', 13.

[54] I want to acknowledge the Marxist scholarship on the use of the term 'from below' in academia. While these readings have added to my understanding of the term and the possibilities of using it across contexts, I am specifically drawing on anti-caste critiques of subaltern historiographies in the Indian context and situating 'from below' as a broad epistemological lens that allows me to probe what is missing from the official photographic vision.

impregnating his photograph with the political agency that Birsa symbolises in the indigenous political struggle today. Rycroft's analysis complicates the role of photography in colonial governance from a subaltern perspective. As a revolutionary leader who was agitating against the British rule, the work of Christian missionaries and the settlement of *dikus* (non-indigenous Indian outsiders) on indigenous land, Birsa Munda's resistance is explored as a subaltern in opposition to not just the colonial state but also the Indian elite. Building on Birsa Munda's eclectic self-perception, his hybrid personality and multi-layered subalternity, Rycroft draws up an interesting argument about how the first photograph of Birsa Munda taken in captivity by the colonial state, reflects the colonial state's "desire for fixed individual and social identities as determined by penological and ethnographic photography."[55] Photography was employed to deny the more-than-human status of Birsa Munda and display his disciplined body to his followers, to counter Birsa and his followers' claim of his divinity. Photography thus was used to make visible Birsa's disempowerment and project the superiority of colonial administration. Rycroft complicates our viewing of this photograph by exploring how the nationalist anti-colonial movement over time, adopted Birsa into the nationalist iconography without acknowledging the complexities in his religious-political identity.

Rycroft's argument is relevant for me as it touches upon several themes significant for this dissertation. First, the use of the photographic medium in governance was beyond what was seen in the image. Second, to retrieve certain subaltern histories from the archive, it is necessary to read/interpret photographs through different strategies such as 'conjecture' that he uses, or 'critical fabulation' as Hartman suggests. Finally, his analysis complicates the postcolonial viewing conditions by drawing up a simultaneous critique of the colonial and the postcolonial elite. All of these themes remain important for this dissertation.

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[55] Rycroft, 'Capturing Birsa Munda', 55.

Postcolonial Historiographies of Photography in India: Pinney and Beyond

Several authors have explored studio photography in colonial presidencies like Bombay, Calcutta and Madras,[56] family photography[57] through marriage photographs[58] or ancestral photographs.[59] There is also an interest in reviving the legacies of individual photographers through personal collections from the colonial period.[60] This trend is now finding its way into the postcolonial period with a renewed gallery interest in the photographic trajectories of lesser-known photographers.[61] There is some work on the role of photography in colonial state-making projects, though this scholarship too, is limited.[62] Much of broader scholarship on Indian photography is restricted to the colonial period and the ones which extend out to the postcolonial period, directly jump to the contemporary[63] or take an anthropological route,[64] without addressing the post-partition decades and the overwhelming influence of the state in the production, collection, and dissemination of photographic vision. My research intends to fill that gap. I intend to bypass the usual focus on individual biographies of photographers, iconic photographs, and the trajectories of pedagogic institutions. Instead, the effort is on exploring the value

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[56] Hapgood, *Early Bombay Photography*. Dewan, 'Useful but dangerous: photography and the madras school of art, 1850-73'.

[57] Phu, Brown, and Dewan, 'The Family Camera Network'.

[58] S Narain, 'Telling Her Story'.

[59] Parayil, 'Visual Perception and Cultural Memory'.

[60] Referring to the interest in Deen Dayal's photography. Dewan and Hutton, *Raja Deen Dayal*, 2014.

[61] Kiran Nadar Museum of Art organised a retrospective on photographer Madan Mahatta in 2020, titled *Delhi Modern: The Architecture of Independence seen through the eyes of Madan Mahatta*. Also, see Allana, 'We Have Not Paid Adequate Tribute to O.P. Sharma, One of Our Pioneering Pictorialists'. A retrospective on the archives of studio owner Suresh Panjabi at the Museum of Art and Photography in 2020-2. Accessed February 22, 2022, https://suresh-punjabi.webflow.io/suresh-punjabi-map. For a retrospective showcase of Kulwant Roy's photographs by Aditya Arya at the National Gallery of Modern Art. See, 'A Tour of the Past through Kulwant Roy's Eyes' *The Hindu,* May 23, 2016.

[62] Shakunthala Rao studies the social and political implications of Samuel Bourne's photographs to argue for the role of photography in establishing colonial rule. Daniel Rycroft also investigates the nuances of photography in colonial state making, as discussed above. See, Rao, 'Imperial Imaginary'; Rycroft, 'Capturing Birsa Munda'. There is also scholarship on the illustrations used in the *People of India* series and its connection to the post-1857 consolidation of the colonial state. This will be discussed in chapter two.

[63] Perera, *The Fear of the Visual?*

[64] Referring to the anthropological turn on Indian photography with the simultaneous publication of Pinney, *Camera Indica*: *The Social Life of Indian Photographs* and Gutman, *Through Indian Eyes*.

of ubiquitous images as they are used to construct and interrupt statist vision, thus charting an expansive terrain for photographic practices in postcolonial India.[65]

In the last three decades, Christopher Pinney's work on Indian photography has been particularly influential.[66] I want to bring attention to one central argument made in his essay on 'surfacism' and vernacular modernism in connection to Indian postcolonialism, to highlight a methodological gap in writing postcolonial photographic histories through the central axis of colonialism. Pinney's essay draws up a distinction between the colonial idea of 'depth' in photography versus the 'surfacism' of the vernacular modern.[67] to evoke a perceptual difference that, according to him, separates the colonial from the postcolonial modes of viewing. While doing so, his frame of reference for investigating postcolonial viewing conditions remains grounded in the idea of the colonial-western-modern as the central axis for defining difference or variation, possibly building on the anticolonial nationalist historiography by Chatterjee and Dipesh Chakrabarty.[68]

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[65] I am building on recent scholarship that engages with socio-political questions through the photographic medium. David Arnold deconstructed colonialism by inverting the gaze on the colonial traveller. Arnold, *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze: India, Landscape, and Science, 1800-1856*. On colonial death imagery of the plague victims, Arnold, 'Picturing Plague'. Amrita Ibrahim's use of photography to study the politics of the encounter in Delhi's Batla House, Ibrahim, "Who Is a Bigger Terrorist than the Police?'. Juned Shaikh's work on caste in colonial housing images, Shaikh, 'Imaging Caste'. Also, work on class differences between photo studio owners in Mussoorie, David MacDougall, 'Photo Hierarchicus'. On images of the 2002 Godhra riots, Chinar Shah, 'Silenced Ruptures, Images from 2002 Gujarat Riots' in *Photography in India*, edited by Blaney and Shah, 149-159. A recent critical reappraisal of the darshanic gaze, expanding it within photography and other visual media. See, Dinkar, 'Tirchhi Nazar'. Pinney's essay on rural sociologist M N Srinivas's engagement with images, Pinney, 'Destroying the Negatives: MN Srinivas, Fire, and Photography'. Zainul Abedin's famine sketches of colonial Bengal are discussed in Sunderason, 'Shadow-Lines'.

[66] To name only a selection: Pinney, *The Indian Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*; Pinney, '"A Secret of Their Own Country: Or, How Indian Nationalism Made Itself Irrefutable'; Pinney and Thomas, *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*; Pinney, 'Camerawork as Technical Practice in Colonial India'; Pinney, 'Some Indian "Views of India": The Ethics of Representation'; Pinney, 'The Nation (Un) Pictured? Chromolithography and 'popular' politics in India, 1878-1995'.

[67] Pinney, 'Notes from the Surface of the Image', 208.

[68] Greg Grandin's essay on local agency, representation, and difference in Mayan studio photography in Guatemala, makes similar criticisms, Grandin, 'Can the Subaltern Be Seen?', 107–11. For his critique of Chakrabarty, Ibid., 110.

I argue that the presence of photography in India's postcolonial period needs to be understood through referents intrinsic to the Indian experience, rather than through a polarised contradiction with the umbrella category of western perspectivism. The postcolonial viewing position then, can be understood as encompassing several colonial and pre-colonial modes of viewing. Simultaneously, our understanding of the colonial perspective, far from being a polarised binary, is constructed through a perspectival engagement between the colonial and the postcolonial modes of viewing. Drawing on Sumit Sarkar and Aloysius' re-articulations of postcolonialism, I intend to explore a history of photography in the viewing conditions generated by the categories of nation, modernity and developmentalism through an *internal* frame, asking questions which are cognisant of social, economic, and cultural inequities in postcolonial India. Doing so would entail a rejection of writing postcolonial photographic histories through Eurocentric modes of viewing, refusing to prescribe an optical vernacularism from a distance.

1. Guman Singh astride a traveling studio's motorbike, c. 1983.

Image 2: Guman Singh on a studio motorbike, image used by Christopher Pinney. Reproduced from *Photography's Other Histories*, Duke University Press, 2003.

Pinney argues that the rejection of the "real" backdrop in favour of chosen 'unreal' (my addition) fictional backdrop is a feature of 'surfacism' of the postcolonial "vernacular" modernism. "No one in Nagda...sees any value in photography's potential to fix quotidian reality."[69] The generalisation of this statement is astounding given that Pinney himself has done extensive fieldwork here and seems aware of the internal contestations in the town.[70] However, his analysis of the 'lack of depth' in studio photographs from Nagda lacks awareness of how the internal divisions in Nagda frame the postcolonial viewing conditions. For instance, he uses the image of Guman Singh on a motorbike posing in a studio from 1983, as an example of a 'fictional' backdrop building onto his argument about the surfacist-vernacularism of postcolonial viewing conditions in India. However, the same image could provoke different questions from a caste-informed perspective of Nagda. Is Guman Singh posing on a 'Royal Enfield' bike in the studio? What caste does Guman Singh belong to? Royal Enfield bikes have been a part of the caste symbolism in India. The dominant caste groups in India have often imposed restrictions on the Dalits from consuming certain commodities. Common restrictions range from prohibiting the Dalits to wear bright clothes, use elephants for their weddings, or ride on Royal Enfield bikes among others. This symbolism of caste oppression has also been challenged by Dalit leaders such as Ambedkar who was always pictured wearing western clothes like suits, to the more recent rise of Chandrashekhar Ravan, the Dalit leader from Uttar Pradesh, whose public persona includes riding a similar Royal Enfield bike as a mark of his resistance to caste discrimination. In this context, the image of Guman Singh and his decision to be photographed on a Royal Enfield bike, with the background of city skyscrapers, does not merely depict his rejection of the 'real' backdrop as Pinney argues. Instead, such photographs when dissected from an informed socio-political perspective could reveal the very 'real' caste relationships in Nagda and photography's role in consolidating and/or resisting them. If Guman Singh is from a dominant caste group, it is relevant to ask if this photograph helps to construct dominant-caste masculinity and analyse his choice of the backdrop as a 'real' marker of his dreams and aspirations as they are negotiated with the local indices of Nagda. If Guman Singh belongs to the oppressed community, it might be worth asking if the studio offered a safe space in the Nagda of 1983, where he could attempt to execute fantasies not accessible to him outside its confines. In either scenario, it is important to ask if Guman Singh had the financial means and resources to visit the urbanscape similar to the backdrop of this image. Could this choice of backdrop, by him or by the studio owner, then reflect

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[69] Nagda is a town in Madhya Pradesh, Central India with a population of ninety-six thousand five hundred and twenty-five (2001 census). This town has been one of the prime sites of Pinney's ethnographic studies in India. See, Pinney, 'Notes from the Surface of the Image', 214.

[70] Pinney did his fieldwork in Nagda in the 1980-90s. Pinney, 'On Living in the Kal(i)Yug', 78–79. Interestingly this article gives a richer account of his fieldwork and the internal differences in Nagda, compared to his interpretation of Singh's photograph above.

a very 'real' aspiration premised on 'real' inequities in the postcolonial Indian society of the 1980-90s? As I have shown, this photograph could reveal several layers of information if 'explored in depth'. However, a 'surface-level analysis' of the backdrop as flat and fictional negates any possibility of delving further into the specifics of particularised viewing conditions in postcolonial India. Pinney uses the photographic medium to make a case for postcolonial optics that is 'fictional' and at the level of 'surface', differing from a western preference for perceiving depth. However, exploring the images through a lens from below, informed by the postcolonial political contestations within India, allows us to see the chosen backdrop as a tangible and concrete marker of caste-divided Nagda society. YS Alone cautions against defining the Indian aesthetic experience as a counter to the West, which could allow it to slip into a consolidation of Brahmanical social power.[71] In agreement, I argue that histories of photography in postcolonial India need a critical evaluation of 'perceptions' that aestheticise the Brahmanical hegemony in India on grounds of 'difference from the West'.

Pinney's essay might be a useful strategy to draw out the divergences in western modernity, however, it does little concerning writing the postcolonial histories of photography in India. Photographs from the period cannot be read without attending to the social and political inequalities of the time, and the resistances formulated to these. One possible way to access the internal dynamics of the postcolonial experience is to alter the nature of questions posed to the photographs. In this dissertation, I make a conscious attempt to ask questions 'from below', locating the ideological bias of this dissertation in solidarity with those looking up to the grand visions of development and modernity. Eli Park Sorensen discusses the question of representation as central to postcolonial studies.[72] While not delving deeper into the literary scholarship of postcolonial theory, this dissertation agrees with his argument, drawing on newer trends in postcolonial studies, that the idea of 'writing back' or probing 'differences', might be primarily seen as "the West's narcissistic encounters with its questionable deeds, and to a lesser extent, an engagement with the realities of postcolonial experiences." Using this analysis in the context of photographic histories in India, allows us to redraw attention to the local *internal* contestations and the perceptual presence of photography within these networks. The Indian experience of the postcolonial period is not an alternative (to the West). It is an experience engendered through its particularities, contradictions, and negotiations. This experience was also not similar for *all* Indians. As seen from the discussion above, the optics of development and modernity transformed depending on

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[71] Alone, 'Visual Tradition and Art Pedagogy'. Sarkar also notes that such categorisations of India through a loose conglomeration of indigenous 'authentic' and 'spiritual' umbrella of the (largely) Hindu fold moves into the dangerous territory of valorising the anti-colonial, overlapping with right-wing conservative claims in postcolonial India. Sarkar, 'The Decline of the Subaltern in Subaltern Studies', 412.

[72] Sorensen, *Postcolonial Realism and the Concept of the Political*, 12.

the socio-political and territorial location of its people. In contradiction to the scholarship that sees Indian (photographic) modernism as a derivative of or counters to Eurocentric experiences, I argue that the postcolonial modes of viewing need to be situated firmly within an *internal* frame, as informed, constituted and negotiated through colonial and pre-colonial experiences.

The Contradictions of Developmental Modernity

Developmental modernity features as a consistent backdrop to my discussion. In this section, I will explain the terms development and modernity, as used in this dissertation. Rebecca Brown highlights the paradox at the heart of artistic production in post-independent India: how to be modern *and* Indian simultaneously,[73] articulating the preference for a universal idea of the Western modern,[74] situating history as a story of progress while simultaneously being possessed with a pre-colonial *authentic* Indian past.[75] While agreeing with Brown on the paradox between Western modernity and the Indian past, I want to highlight that the postcolonial experience also involved a third element – the assimilation (or negation) of the Indian trajectories of modernity. As Gopal Guru notes, the Dalits articulate modernity in India through the emancipatory language of rights, equality, and justice.[76] At the forefront of such a 'modernist' articulation was Dr Ambedkar's rejection of caste as a 'pre-modern' system rooted in a language of obligation. This articulation of the Dalits drew from the emancipatory ideas in Western modernity as well as in the ideological work of local Indian anti-caste activists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries such as Jyotiba Phule and EV Periyar Ramasamy among others. Modernity thus

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[73] Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, 1.

[74] The postcolonial project became a means by which modernity would be engendered as a naturalised, indigenous state of being. This was premised on the recognition of the absence of modernity in the postcolonial moment. Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State*, 19.

[75] Similar arguments for an indigenous 'authentic' have been furthered by other scholarly writings. Partha Chatterjee has famously written about the material-spiritual divide during colonial rule, situating the spiritual (domestic) as the domain of an 'authentic' pre-colonial identity. See, Brown, "Authenticity" in *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, 23–44; Chakrabarty, 'Nation and Imagination'; Chakrabarty, 'The Difference'; Chatterjee and Caṭṭopādhyāẏa, *The Nation and Its Fragments*.

[76] Guru, 'Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity'. Also, Kancha Ilaiah's discussion on the lineages of anti-caste Dalit-Bahujan thought in Ilaiah, 'The Roots of anti-Caste Nationalism,' in *The Weapon of the Other*, 41–60.Vinay Bahl has also explored the material grounds of 'differences' with and within subalterns, pointing out dissonant definitions of modernity in Bahl, 'Relevance (or Irrelevance) of Subaltern Studies'.

must be understood for its emancipatory linkages to Indian tradition as well as for its roots in Western Enlightenment.

The conception of modernity is further complicated when we acknowledge that the desire for the modern was not always top-down. As Scott observes, if modernity was a practice of state-inscribed 'legibility', making populations 'readable' and therefore governable to states, legibility could also be an expectation of the "trade union consciousness" which make states 'readable' and therefore less powerful to the people. Scott gives examples of codes and rules, which enhance predictability and therefore minimise the power exercised as a measure of discretion.[77] Such codification of rules with regard to labour can upturn the idea of obligation and debt that is intrinsic to a Brahminical understanding of labour. Such a perception opens up the space to see legibility and its underlying modernist impulses, through the aspirational lens of the subaltern in postcolonial India. This perception allows us to situate modernity as a subaltern desire too and dissociate ourselves from the confines of seeing modernity solely as a state view. This argument of complicated and multi-directional modernity can be further applied to understand postcolonial aspirations for developmental modernism. While development is often understood as a de-politicising machine,[78] an extension of state power and as a manifestation of the colonial nations exercising control in its ex-colonies through the dynamics of post-War 'aid',[79] Peter De Vries notes the people's desire for and re-engagement with development despite its persistent 'failures'.[80] Subir Sinha has similarly noted the political implications of postcolonial rural development programs on agrarian politics.[81]

Development and modernity both mobilise contradictory impulses and refuse to be categorised into neat axes of colonial versus anti-colonial. Further, it is important to remember that the 1950s was a time when most of these concepts were in the process of being formulated and their utopian promises were as relevant as their subsequent failures. These contested territories of development, modernity and

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[77] Scott, 'Further Reflections on Seeing Like a State', 513.

[78] Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

[79] Engerman, 'Development Politics and the Cold War'.

[80] De Vries, 'Don't Compromise Your Desire for Development! A Lacanian/Deleuzian Rethinking of the Anti-Politics Machine'. Partha Chatterjee has noted that the pursuit of development and welfare policies of the state has created conditions for the subaltern to demand resources from the state. Chatterjee, 'Politics of the Governed'. A similar approach is seen in Kumar, ' A Big Machine Not Working Properly'. A collection of essays on regional modernities discussed the idea of people's collective response to developmental modernities, arguing for a re-articulation of the local as a product of 'specific articulations'. Sivaramakrishnan and Agrawal, *Regional Modernities*.

[81] Sinha, 'Lineages of the Developmentalist State'.

postcolonial nationhood will form the foundation of my discussion. Each of the chapters will explore these ideas in detail and situate the optical nodes of the engagement generated through photography's intersection with these ideas.

Finally, the story of developmental modernity in India can be told in many ways. Successive generations of historians, economists and political theorists have added to the discourse. My approach here is to focus on the 'optics' of developmental modernity, investigating the *view* "from above"– its blind spots, interruptions, and dissonances. While doing so, I have deliberately chosen to not highlight some threads in the story of the postcolonial nation-state formation. One significant aspect I have not attended to is the religion/secular discourse as it was entwined in the assertions of development and post-colonial nation-building.[82] Religion was an important category through divided articulations of religion as faith versus religion as politics[83] or Nehruvian assertions of developmental sites as the modern 'secular' temples.[84] Another important discussion left unattended here is the presence of women in nation-building and the patriarchal state's gendered ways of seeing.[85] Women were an integral part of the postcolonial state's developmental modernist agendas, as subjects that validated the necessity of development and as corporeal markers for measuring its modernising mission. These topics are however not picked up, to stick to the photographic material discussed in this dissertation.

Working with Photographic Archives

In this section, I will address my methods of collecting archival photographs and the structure I have used for presenting these in the dissertation. While there is a growing scholarship on photographic histories in the colonial period, surprisingly the postcolonial decades have not been adequately explored, especially photographic collections held in the state archives. Addressing this gap, I have chosen to discuss a series of photographs found in the state archives as my *primary sources*. These

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[82] A selection: Cinar, Roy, and Yahya, *Visualizing Secularism and Religion: Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, India*; Van der Veer, 'Nationalism and Religion'; David Ludden, *Making India Hindu*; Jaffrelot, 'Religion and Nationalism'; Sarkar, 'Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva'.

[83] Nandy, 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance'.

[84] For reference, see Klingensmith, 'Building India's "Modern Temples"'.

[85] Two works that have particularly influenced my understanding are Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, Community, Religion, and Cultural Nationalism*; Nivedita Menon, *Seeing like a Feminist*. Malavika Karlekar's work on representations of Indian women in the colonial period is a useful addition. Karlekar, *Visualizing Indian Women*.

include photographic albums produced by engineers and gifted to Nehru, albums produced during diplomatic visits and presented as a farewell gift to the visitor, photographs published in the commemorative volumes produced by a dam building project, photographs in-use in government offices, photographs housed by government archives, and so on. These photographs by their very presence in state collections are official photographs – produced, catalogued, stored, and distributed through state agents such as bureaucrats, official photographers, government archives and the government's publicity division. To bring in Ranajit Guha's definition of the term *official* as that which is meant primarily for administrative use, for the information of the government, I am reading the production and 'intended' circulation of these photographs as contingent on the reasons of the State. Even if these photographs incorporate the "other side", it is out of administrative concern.[86]

At times, I am bringing photographs outside of state authorship and collection, such as the *Images of India* exhibition displayed in a private gallery and later reproduced in a magazine. While the production of the exhibition is not through Photos Division or any other governmental institution, I intend to bring this exhibition to study the overlaps of official photographs with those authored and circulated outside the official discourse, to expound on the porous boundaries of state vision and its formation in relation to several non-state institutions and collectives.

The National Archives in New Delhi, a primary site for my research, is known for making it tedious for anyone who wants to research the post-colonial period. After passing through the endless list of bureaucratic approvals and navigating the vaguely organised catalogues, more often than not, records, even though formally unclassified, were often returned with a 'Not Transferred' reply, sometimes after a delay of several days. Another significant site, the Photos Division, as I discussed earlier, is a site defined by its closure for photo researchers.

Working with photographic archives was multiply challenging. For one, rarely are photographic records kept separate from textual material, and rarely could I find any cataloguing information more than the date on which the archive or library accessed the photographs. Joan Schwartz has noted the textual model of recording information and bibliographic model of image classification that fixates on the factual origins of the content rather than the functional origins of images. In the National Archives

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[86] My use of the term 'official' is inaugurated by Ranajit Guha's use of the term in reference to primary historical sources. While he refers to textual records and documents, I am extending his definition to define the official nature of photographs found in state archives. See, Guha, 'The prose of counter-insurgency', 47-48.

Photos Section and the NMML Photo Section – two primary archival sites for this research, most photographic albums, the subject of two chapters in this dissertation, were ordered numerically with generic titles which conveyed little to no information on what the album is about. Bureaucratic procedures in the National Archives meant that I could only access one or two albums at a time, often randomly guessing what could be important for my research from their very generic titles. To see a silver lining in this experience, would be to appreciate that the absence of cataloguing allowed me to chance upon albums far beyond the range of this research, allowing me to get a glimpse into the variety of photographic albums in the state archives.

The other challenge with the state photographic archives is that often the photographs (when accessible) are dumped together in hoards. Since most researchers working with archival sources usually access photographs as example illustrations to their work, only the sharpest and most iconic images find an external audience. The rest are stacked by thousands, often very similar-looking images, several shots of the same view, taken from multiple angles and differing depths. This posed a problem for me, as I tried to navigate through and make sense of extensive unexplored photographs.

Additionally, I want to acknowledge that some images used here, were originally made only for study references and the quality is not the best. I intended to return to the archives to obtain better-quality images. However, this proved impossible due to the pandemic.

I visited the Bhakra Nangal Dam in 2019 – the subject of one of the chapters here and met the families of those who were displaced by the dam building. I also visited the official state archive and museum at Nangal and interviewed employees at the archive. I further collected poetry, and personal photographs from local activists and all of these together supplement my section on what is missing in the official dam archives. Apart from this, I have accessed the material available with the *Photographic Society of India* in Mumbai, interviewed some of their senior members and looked at archives of private magazines like the *Click*, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, and *Marg*, as well as official ones such as the *Yojana* and *Kurukshetra.*

The process of researching state vision was itself marked by a series of closures – those induced by the pandemic of course, but more significantly those that were marked by state censorship such as the Photos Division and the Bhakra Dam archives, those that wore me down by bureaucratic delays and hurdles such as the National Archives, and those that are absent because of lack of initiative, resource and storage facilities such as the *Click* archives at the PSI. Poignantly then, state vision emerged for me through a phenomenological experience of these gaps, silences, censorship, and closures.

The images I will discuss in this dissertation nowhere represent the expanse of what is available in the state collections. My intent is not to give a survey of photographic practices in the period. Given the abundance of photographic material, the photographs finally selected for analysis reflect personal choice, one that is informed by logistical convenience and ideological positioning. The material I have chosen to highlight is instrumental in bringing out certain inner contradictions at play in the formation of the postcolonial viewing conditions in the early years after independence. My interest lies in exploring photography in ubiquitous spaces, through non-iconic moments and often through lesser-known or anonymous photographers and consumers, investigating the political nature of choice and access in institutional ownership, production, accumulation, and censorship of the photographs. In different ways, each of the chapters will touch on these aspects. In part, my dissertation attempts to contribute to bringing new and unseen photographic material and sources to light, while emphasising the relevance of approaching photographic writing outside the canons of individual photographers, patronising institutions, and galleries.

I also do not want to see photographs in a purely representational role. I do not think that the photographs discussed in this dissertation clarify 'what is state vision' by what is shown in the image. Quite the opposite, the attempt here is to delve into the context and use of these photographs, and their formal presence within the official networks where I found them. Oftentimes, as we will see, in the course of the dissertation, the image content of the photographs is underplayed as the context takes over and gives a new layer of meaning to the image shown and the photograph taken. State vision, in a reference to Gramscian thought, *emerged* out of these chaotic overlaps between the official and the non-official, the movement of photographers in and out of government institutions, and the disconnections between what was intended to be 'shown' through the photographs and what ended up in the image. At times, state vision, as it is defined in this dissertation, also emerges out of absences, silences, and missing images. I have tried to incorporate some photographs from private collections, some oral testimonies, poetry, and textual records to read into what is missing in the official archives, thereby through the scope of this dissertation, expanding the boundaries of state vision to create space for those images it blurs out and deliberately unsees.

Notes on the Dissertation

It has been my deliberate attempt to shift away from the urbaneness of much photographic writing, not making the photographic material from Bombay, Calcutta or Madras the centre of my dissertation.

While one chapter is devoted to a photo exhibition in Bombay and discusses the camera clubs involved in organising it, the other three chapters discuss material from the state archive in the town of Nangal in Punjab, closely bordering the hill state of Himachal Pradesh; photographic albums produced by the Public Works Department engineers working in the rural areas in the state of Uttar Pradesh and photographic material received as diplomatic gifts highlighting its trans-national origins.

In this dissertation, I choose to see the 1947 partition and the retreat of the British as formal ruptures that mark the beginning of an ex-colonial and violently segregated nation. Beginning from there I draw up 1964 as the end of Nehru's term as Prime Minister as a tentative closure for my analysis. This categorisation from 1947-1964 is again a logistical choice made to facilitate a deeper exploration of a specific decade (the 1950s, and a few years on each side). Nehru's imprint in the years after independence makes this categorisation important. However, this dissertation in no way sees 1947 or 1964 as the definite beginning or ending point. As Atreyee Gupta and Sunderason both have shown in their work, there was a great deal of continuity in art practices in the 1940s, before and after partition; also, Lal Bahadur Shastri, the man who succeeded Nehru did not dramatically alter the ideological drift of the Nehruvian period.

Throughout, I stick to the older names of cities (Bombay, Madras and Calcutta) to be accurate to the period under discussion. I have also taken the liberty to use the concept of 'India' and the category of 'Indian' in expansive terms. While doing so, I fully acknowledge the fraught nature of these categories and the turbulent conflicts on territory, citizenship and nationalism that have been a feature of this formation. My use of the term *India* in this dissertation simply refers to the territory as defined constitutionally. The same can be said for my use of the term "Indian" unless indicated otherwise. Relatedly, my use of the term west/western throughout this dissertation refers to a broader material process of "cultural homogeneity"[87] produced through similar and overlapping modes of capitalist production, and colonial experiences of knowledge production. These experiences of colonising territories and populations, simultaneously adopting capitalist systems of production and exchange are historically rooted in certain geographies, predominantly the United States, Britain, and several European states. However, the use of this blanket category of the 'west/western' is made with an acknowledgement that colonialism and advanced capitalism were processes, perhaps more prevalent in certain regions than others; and that these very regions have their fair share of resistance to these processes, and also have active pedagogical and epistemological alternatives to these processes.[88]

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[87] Referring to Aijaz Ahmed's use of the term. Ahmad, *In Theory*, 105.

[88] Building my argument based on Ahmed's writing. Ibid., 103.

I also want to acknowledge the growing scholarship that situates cinema as a frame to observe the postcolonial.[89] Their writing has contributed to my understanding of the period, yet I have chosen to not engage with this material in-depth due to my lack of expertise in film studies and the formative difference between photography and film.

In addition, as explored by several scholars, the years after 1947 were a time of nation-building that simultaneously encompassed the construction of a developmental future and the invention of an ancient traditional past for India. It was indeed an interesting time, as the nation was reinvented as *ancient* while the postcolonial state carried a distinctive futuristic mark. The state's efforts to invent an ancient past for the Indian nation were also in service of its desire to move forward. Photography, with its connection of scientific objectivity, internationalism and futurism, became an important tool for the post-colonial state, and this aspect of photography's intersection with the postcolonial state's forward drive is the subject of this dissertation. As discussed earlier, archaeological historian Sudeshna Guha has written about the role of photography in the construction of archaeological knowledge. I want to acknowledge that this aspect of photography's role in the invention of an ancient past is a relevant and exciting theme and could have been further explored in the first chapter of the dissertation, as some of the images in the *Images of India* exhibition refer to the past. However, in an attempt to stick to the broader dissertation theme of exploring photography in relation to the developmental future, I have chosen to only engage with photographs that align with this overall focus.

Chapter Plan

I have chosen to organise each chapter around a specific set of photographs, quite simply because I intend to foreground the photographic medium as it intersected with the construction of state vision in different forms.

The first chapter explores the photographic imagination of postcolonial India through an analysis of a nearly absent photography exhibition titled *Images of India* in 1960. Drawing on the reproduction of its photographic portfolio in the anti-colonial nationalist magazine *Marg*, I explore the photographic image

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[89] Jaikumar, *Where Histories Reside*. Also, Majumdar, *Art Cinema and India's Forgotten Futures;* Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema*, 1947-1987; Moodley, 'Postcolonial Feminisms Speaking through an ''Accented' Cinema''.

of the forward-marching welfare state as it emerges from the magazine archives. As a non-statist production, the *Images of India* offered, to use Scott's words, "optical illusions that are complementary and competitive [to the statist vision] at the same time".[90] In the absence of archival material on the original gallery exhibition, the first half of the chapter attempts to dig up this exhibition through a simultaneous frame of the local and transnational. Using archival and ethnographic field research, I argue for the local specificities of this exhibition, anchored in the photography club culture of Bombay. Running parallel to this is the transnational frame induced by the universal humanist appeal of Steichen's *The Family of Man* in India at the same art gallery that later hosted the *Images of India*. Well-known novelist, *Marg's* founder Mulk Raj Anand and his associations with anti-colonial nationalism, postcolonial art and architecture and his interest in raising the status of the photographic medium in India, will be used to foreground photographic aspirations in the time of postcolonial nation-building. Through this chapter, I seek to explore the postcolonial photographic vision outside official channels, complicating the boundaries of state vision - where does the official way of seeing stop and where does the non-official begin? Tying the photographic image of 'India' produced in the exhibition to national, local, and transnational frames simultaneously, I argue that state vision is spread outwards as much as it is located centrally within the office of the Photos Division in New Delhi.

In a recent response to Nicholas Smith's critique on the absence of individual state agents in his 1998 study, Scott notes that any abstraction has a particular face, in the form of state agents and systems that the subjects engage with on a day-to-day basis.[91] In chapter two, I attempt to explore state vision by investigating how specific state actors use photography. Drawing on a photographic album prepared by a group of Public Work Department engineers who were sent as outside experts to reconstruct a group of villages in western Uttar Pradesh, I explore photography's intersection with postcolonial developmental work, its reformist logic of improvement, and the modernist obsession to establish order to complex living realities.

While there is much photographic material on well-known and well-documented state-run rural development programs like Nilokheri and Etawah, I have intentionally chosen to explore a relatively unknown example here. The reasons for this are multiple – one, I want to foreground an album made by engineers as a unique photographic object in itself. In a time when photography was used within state departments to create propaganda around governmental schemes and was often employed for pedagogical ends, this album is an aberration for its messy and unpolished production, which highlights

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[90] Scott, 'Further Reflections on Seeing Like a State', 507.

[91] Smith, 'Seen Like a State'. Scott, 'Further Reflections on Seeing Like a State'.

the boundaries of state vision by exception. Two, it is authored by a group of engineers who take ownership of the narrative in the album, offering a concrete entry point to explore the construction of state vision through the eyes of its employees. Finally, this album with its focus on village development allows me to delve into 'The Village' as a central frame for analysis. In the early decades after 1947, the national and transnational politics of developmental modernity was played out at the village level. While there is scholarship in art history which looks at the village as a site of tradition and authenticity,[92] and that which looks at the village as a picturesque idyllic landscape, I intend to move away from these and build on Ambedkar's understanding of the Indian village as a caste-divided site, that is only further complicated by the developmental modernist aspirations that marked the postcolonial period.

The third chapter looks at the spectacle of developmental modernism through two registers. In the first part, I explore the state archives and official publications to examine the construction of state vision through the institutional lens of the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB). The wide circulation of photographs under the BBMB can be read as an attempt to make development visible and legible to the citizenry of the newly independent nation which has not seen or experienced development yet.

Much writing on the visual nature of India's modernity has been explored through the city of Chandigarh, an icon of Le Corbusier's modernist aesthetics.[93] However, I decided to steer away from Chandigarh and explore the story of India's visual modernism through photographic material on the Bhakra Dam. One of the main reasons for this was the firm belief that no account of developmental modernism in India could be understood without simultaneously understanding its human and ecological costs. The story of accidents, displacement and loss is not just a retrospective critique of developmental modernism, but a simultaneously unfolding contradiction at the heart of developmental modernism. Situating the Bhakra Dam as the centre of my visual analysis in chapter three, allows me to locate displacement, loss, and silence as central to the optics of developmental modernism in India.

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[92] Referring to the chapter on 'Authenticity' in Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, 23-45.

[93] The construction of Chandigarh integrated both nationalist and internationalist aspirations that co-existed in Nehru's ideas of modernism. For a discussion on Chandigarh city and the Nehruvian idea of the 'modern' refer to Khosla, 'The New Metropolis'. Von Moos and Walden, 'The Politics of the Open Hand'. Singh, Kahlon, and Chandel, 'Political Discourse and the Planned City'. Perera, 'Contesting Visions'. For a discussion on Chandigarh and Le Corbusier's aesthetics, see Brown, *Art for a Modern India,* 1947-1980, 103-130; Gupta, 'In a Postcolonial Diction: Postwar Abstraction and the Aesthetics of Modernization'.

In the second part of this chapter, I bring together oral testimonies, poetry, and personal photographs to identify the omissions, silences, and failures of the state vision. While doing so, the central concern remains - how was this grand developmental vision constructed? Who were the participants? Who was left out of the discussion? Who benefited from this developmental imagination? What happened to those who contested this developmental vision? How can we as researchers explore the official archives for the occluded and disregarded, deliberately hidden, or un-photographed stories?

The fourth and final chapter of the dissertation inverts the vertical axis of the prior chapters, to situate the emergence of state vision on a horizontal transnational axis where each nation was simultaneously seeing, showing, and hiding itself during the Cold War period. Situating the Indian state under Nehru as the photographed object, this chapter asks: How does the state render itself visible to other states? When the photographic subject is the Indian Prime Minister, a representative of the Indian state, the postcolonial nation is under 'visual' scrutiny, being represented and defined through photographic modes of seeing.

The chapter will examine a photographic album gifted to Nehru by the State Fine Arts Department in Moscow after a diplomatic visit to the USSR in 1955. This album is interesting because it offers a glimpse of the diplomatic gaze of the Soviet Union on India. Again, this album is embedded in multiple layers of seeing. The visit was marked by Nehru's desire to *see* the planned development within the Soviet Union. The individual photographs show Nehru seeing and being photographed seeing different places in the Union. The album as a collection of these photographs projects a vision of Nehru as the visitor while showing itself as a diplomatic friend hosting Nehru. Made with an intention to be gifted to Nehru, the production of this album is inclusive of Nehru seeing himself and the Soviet Union through the album. By examining the diplomatic context and aspirations embedded in the making and exchange of this album, I intend to complicate the presence of the photographic medium within the Cold War context.

Towards the later part of the chapter, as a corollary form to the Soviet album, I will discuss an album gifted to Nehru by Indonesian youth groups in 1947. Contrary to the Soviet album, this album produces an anti-colonial witnessing, reformulating the universal humanist rhetoric explored in the first chapter. By doing so, I intend to highlight photography's varied presence in the transnational alliances of the postcolonial state and its possible contribution to a decolonial remaking of the world, as suggested by Adom Getachew.

1. *Images of India:* A Response to *The Family of Man* Exhibition in Postcolonial India

In 1960, a photography exhibition titled *Images of India* was mounted at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay. The exhibition was a result of over a million entries drawn for a contest and divided the large thematic of 'Indian life" into separate sections such as architecture and sculpture, work and worship, birth, marriage and death, womanhood, city sights and village ways, planning and progress. From one hundred and thirty-five thousand photographs that were reviewed as entries, only two-hundred and fifty were selected, making a total tally of one-hundred and six photographers from India (except for French photographer Jean Hermans, who was visiting India at that point). Connections were drawn between this exhibition and Edward Steichen's internationally renowned exhibition *The Family of Man*. *Images of India* curator RJ Chinwalla himself credited Steichen's exhibition as the inspiration. Besides, the *Images of India* was hosted by the same Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay, where *The Family of Man* was displayed in June 1956.[94]

Previous consideration of the exhibition has been limited to a few passing references in online articles, blog posts or footnotes of academic writings. Despite its significance in the photographic history of post-colonial India has been largely unexplored in academic writing on the history of photography. One of the only relevant references is by Atreyee Gupta when she notes the *Images of India* as a response to *The Family of Man* in India, one that 'significantly differed' from its inspiration.[95] One possible reason for this lack of in-depth scholarship on *Images of India* could be because this is a difficult exhibition to trace in the archives. Besides the exhibition display, a portfolio of seventy-two images from the main display was published in the December 1960 issue of *Marg*- a quarterly magazine on Indian Art,[96] accompanied by a curatorial essay by its curator, Chinwalla, and some anecdotes by photographers who participated. Additionally, a couple of international reviews on the exhibition are available in *The Royal Photographic Society* archives. According to (pandemic imposed) phone conversations with the staff at the Jehangir Art Gallery, there are negligible records from the 1950s. It has also been difficult to access photography magazines from the period, which could have carried some information about the photo contest that led to the exhibition. As a result, the bulk of my analysis refers to the material from *Marg*,

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[94] Chinwalla talks about the *Family of Man* exhibition and how it inspired the *Images of India* in RJ Chinwalla, "Contemporary Trends in Indian Photography," *Marg*, December 1960, 17.

[95] Gupta, '"Belatedness and Simultaneity', 33-35.

[96] *Marg* was a quarterly magazine on Indian visual and performing arts and architecture founded by Mulk Raj Anand in 1946. On *Marg* and the architectural modernity, Lee and James-Chakraborty, 'Marg Magazine'.

the most exhaustive source of information for the exhibition as of now. However, in this chapter, I intend to trace the networks of the people involved with the exhibition and its reproduction in *Marg* magazine, in an attempt to draw on multiple threads that could reveal the context and networks that gave rise to the *Images of India* exhibition.

In 1946, Mulk Raj Anand along with fourteen others founded *Marg*, the quarterly "Journal of the Arts". The origin of the magazine was thus linked to the brink of independence and a de-colonising movement that was gathering globally.[97] Mulk - "a litterateur, novelist, institution-builder, and social activist – and a leftist"[98] was an established Indian English writer having spent more than two decades in London before coming back to India in 1945.[99] From 1946 to 1981, Mulk remained the editor of *Marg*. Jagmohan also points out that *Marg* and Mulk became synonymous over the years.[100] Deboo notes that "the magazine's voice largely grew out of Mulk's personality and beliefs"[101] such as his political ideology, commitment to decolonising, alignment with Nehruvian ideas, and support for internationalism with a specific South Asian focus were reflected in the themes and topics chosen for *Marg*. As the editor of Marg, he is a pivotal figure in our discussion on the photography exhibition reproduced by the magazine. As his editorial essay in the December 1960 issue notes, reproducing the exhibition portfolio for the readers of *Marg* was an attempt to bring to notice the potential of Indian photographic practitioners as artists, claiming a fine art status for photography.

The audience for the photographs discussed here thus includes the people who saw the show at the Jehangir Art Gallery as well as the readers of the *Marg* magazine. In addition, several photographs had been in circulation before they were shown as a part of the exhibition, such as Henri Cartier Bresson's photographs of Gandhi's funeral and Sunil Janah's photographs of the 1943 famine. All these observations point to the fact that while it is difficult to estimate the actual number of visitors to the

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[97] Khurshed Deboo, 'Revisiting the past, reimagining a future,' *Himal South Asian* (February 2021). Accessed on https://www.himalmag.com/revisiting-the-past-reimagining-a-future-2021/, on August 04, 2022.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Mulk Raj Anand's novel 'Untouchable' was published in 1935 and received wide acclaim. Along with R K Narayan and Raja Rao, Anand is regarded as one of the three main figures of Indo-Anglian fiction, Verma, 'Understanding Mulk Raj Anand'.

[100] Mohan, 'Mulk Raj Anand's Marg'.

[101] Deboo, 'Revisiting the Past'.

Images of India exhibition in Bombay, the photographs on display were viewed by many more people than those who visited the exhibition.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section will give an overview of *The Family of Man* exhibition building on the critical scholarship by Roland Barthes and Allan Sekula among others. I will further investigate *The Family of Man's* intersection with photography in India through a 'localised' postcolonial lens. This will be done by studying the *Images of India* exhibition for its overlaps and divergences with *The Family of Man.* The discussion will further examine the origin of the exhibition in the local photography networks of Bombay such as the *Photographic Society of India* and explore its aspirational connection to Steichen's brand of universal humanism and his belief that photography was a global language. The second section will examine some photographs from the *Images of India* exhibition published in *Marg* and juxtapose them with exhibition curator Chinwalla's writing on photography and *Marg* editor Mulk Raj Mulk's presence in the intellectual and artistic exchange of the post-1947 period. I intend to study the exhibition as a starting point to explore the photographic imagination of the 1950s-60s and the image of the postcolonial state that emerges. By elaborating on the historical specificities of this exhibition, I argue that unlike Steichen's brand of universal humanism, the *Images of India* exhibition is firmly situated in a localised optic that is connected to the postcolonial present.

In effect, this chapter will explore the local, national, and transnational connections of the *Images of India* exhibition to contemplate the photographic image of the postcolonial state emerging outside state collections.

The Family of Man in India

Image 3: Ezra Stoller, 'Installation shots of *The Family of Man* in New York', photograph, *MoMA,*
New York.

The Family of Man exhibition was conceived and directed by Edward Steichen, Director of the
Department of Photography at the *Museum of Modern Art* (MoMA) in New York. Since its opening,
the exhibition attracted a huge audience in the United States and abroad. It exhibited a total of five
hundred and three photographs from sixty-eight countries, representing the work of two hundred and
seventy-three photographers. The photographs featured in the exhibition were largely from the archives

of *LIFE* magazine,[102] the *Vogue*, the *Ladies Home Journal* and photo agencies such as the *Magnum* and the *Black Star*. Mostly 'contemporary documentary photographs', were grouped into thirty-seven thematic sections that visualised the story of human life to a post-War audience.

In September 1955, *The Family of Man* exhibition began its world tour.[103] Between 1955 and 1962, the exhibition travelled to ninety-one cities in thirty-eight countries, a total of ten different versions of the show, were seen by an estimated nine million people.[104] The United States Information Agency (USIA) took an active part in organising the exhibition's world tour, to illuminate an American vision in the newly divided Cold War world. At the peak of the Cold War, Steichen's exhibition reflected the USIA mission (1953) "to understand, inform and influence foreign publics in promotion of the national interest". The exhibition presented an optimistic, universalising picture of the multicultural collective of humanity which, for curator Steichen, was worthy of appreciation in other parts of the world.[105]

The Family of Man exhibition has been repeatedly criticised for projecting an explicitly American view under the guise of a supposedly nationless universal gaze.[106] Besides its role in Cold War propaganda, Steichen's essentialist depiction of human experiences was criticised by Roland Barthes[107] and Allan Sekula as a prototype of American Cold War liberalism that universalised the bourgeoise nuclear family and acted as an instrument of cultural colonialism.[108] Christopher Phillips, on the other hand, criticised Steichen for silencing the voice of individual photographers by decontextualizing their photographs and imposing his own narrative.[109] While agreeing with these reviews of the exhibition, this chapter would

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[102] Sarah James discusses the ideological positioning of *LIFE* magazine by drawing attention to the words of founder Henry Luce who, in the 1940s, suggested that being "the world's guiding light" was an intrinsic American value; James, *Common Ground: German Photographic Cultures across the Iron Curtain*, 47.

[103] Different editions were made for Europe and Asia as noted in the Press Release dated May 01, 1955. Accessed on February 12, 2011, from
https://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/press_archives/1940/releases/MOMA_1955_0055_3
9.pdf.

[104] Alise Tīfentāle, 'The Family of Man'. Also, Steichen and Sandburg, *The Family of Man*.

[105] James, *Common Ground*, 47.

[106] On the emergence of US cultural hegemony, Guilbaut, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. For a wider context of this exhibition in American Art, Gehring, 'The Family of Man and Post-War Debates about American Art'.

[107] Barthes, 'The Great Family of Man', 100–102.

[108] Sekula, 'The Traffic in Photographs', 15–25.

[109] Phillips, 'The Judgment Seat of Photography', 27-63.

also like to see Steichen's exhibition as representative of its time. In line with Eric Sandeen's suggestion, the images of Steichen's show can be understood for the way the USIA used seemingly timeless images to make historically specific appeals relevant in a polarised Cold War climate.[110] Contemporary scholarship has attempted to locate the politics of the exhibition through its reception in the countries it toured and its embroilment in localised cultural politics.[111] Sarah James' essay on Karl Pawek's 1964 exhibition *What is Man?* as a local and historically specific response to Steichen's show is useful to investigate forms of local answering back.[112]

The appeal of Steichen's exhibition was not just anthropological, but also political in its implications. The original *Family of Man* display is known to have ended with an image of the United Nations' assembly hall, urging the audience to choose 'world peace' over nuclear war (the previous picture being the H-bomb test site). It was possibly aimed at leveraging a new sense of belonging, a global citizenship in the transnational world of the 1950 and the 1960s. Blake Stimson summarises that this exhibition gave form to a system of belonging driven by a sense of post-War identity crisis. Stimson notes that the dream of universal equality was one way of dealing with the post-War fears. The exhibition utilised the fear of a nuclear holocaust to emphasise the essential oneness of mankind, urging the audience to look for the similarities that unite the world.[113]

In contradiction, Ariella Azoulay has argued that the exhibition can be viewed as a visual equivalent to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.[114] In a time when the politics of the United Nations held a promise of an inclusive global world, the appeal of *The Family of Man* exhibition cannot be completely disavowed.[115] The United Nations advertised photography as a means of peaceful cultural

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[110] Sandeen, 'The International Reception of The Family of Man', 352.

[111] See, Takenaka, 'The Family of Man in Japan', 44–55; Sandeen, 'The Family of Man in Guatemala'. Hurm, Reitz, and Zamir, *The Family of Man Revisited*. Also, see O'Brian, 'The Nuclear Family of Man' and Wulf, *US International Exhibitions during the Cold War*.

[112] James, 'A Post-Fascist Family of Man,' in *Common Ground,* 47-102.

[113] Stimson, *The Pivot of the World,* 84-93.

[114] Ariella Azoulay, 'The Family of Man: A Visual Universal Declaration of Human Rights'.

[115] Her work builds on similar scholarship that has assessed the exhibition more positively such as John Roberts who notes that the depiction of African Americans in the exhibition was progressive for its times. Roberts, *The Art of Interruption*, 122–24. Lili Bezner also notes the heterogeneity that fits into the framework of Steichen's overarching narrative. Bezner, 'Subtle Subterfuge'.

exchange. attributing photography with significant power to bring about social change.[116] Humanistic claims about the unity and equality of all people accompanied the UN and UNESCO photography publications and exhibitions. In such a context, photography's role as a universal language can be seen for its association with the post-War world's need for a 'universal humanism'.[117]

Roland Barthes argued that *The Family of Man* exhibition describes Birth and Death as natural, universal facts. "For these natural facts to gain access to a true language, they must be inserted into a category of knowledge… and precisely subject their naturalness to our human criticism".[118] According to Barthes, using photography to reproduce the natural processes of Birth and Death means nothing if we do not investigate the material and historical antecedents to these universal phenomena. As we go further, this critique by Barthes will be foundational to the discussion in this chapter.

From June 1956 to September 1957, *The Family Of Man* toured seven cities in India, first showcasing at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay (June 18–July 15, 1956, ext. July 20) and then moving to Industries Fair Grounds in Delhi (Nov–Dec 5, 1956), University of Agra Library, Agra (Aug 31–Sept 19, 1956), Cultural Centre, Ahmedabad (Jan 11–Feb 1, 1957), Ranji Stadium, Calcutta (March–April, 1957), Madras University, Madras (June 10–July 21), 1957; and finally in Trivandrum (Sept 1–22, 1957). Thirteen images from the entire exhibition depict India. Out of these thirteen, seven explicitly focus on "the suffering, the starving, the insane, the sick and the dying".[119] Curiously, of the thirteen images from India, only one was attributed to an Indian photographer, Satyajit Ray (1921-1992). The image, showing a mother taking care of children, is not a photograph, but a film still from the internationally acclaimed film *Pather Panchali* (1955). Tifentāle points out that Ray was the film's director, and therefore it would be reasonable to assume that the author of this image was the film's cinematographer, Subrata Mitra (1931-2001). Tifentāle sees the inclusion of a film still from an Indian artist, and its incorrect attribution to the film director instead of the actual author, as an example of

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[116] Allbeson, 'Photographic Diplomacy in the PostWar World'. Also, Krebs, 'Popularizing Anthropology, Combating Racism'.

[117] Solomon-Godeau, *Photography after Photography,* 43-60.

[118] Barthes, 'The Great Family of Man,' 101. Recent scholarship has also reassessed Barthes' critique of Steichen's work See, Hurm, 'Reassessing Roland Barthes's Myth of The Family of Man'.

[119] Tīfentāle, 'The Family of Man'. Tifentale's PhD dissertation illuminates the (non) representation of India in the *Family of Man*, drawing a comparison with another global alliance, the Fédération Internationale de l'art photographique (FIAP) which showcased the work of several Indian photographers, giving voice to the local photographers. See, Tīfentāle, The "Olympiad of Photography*, 2020, 60–83.

Steichen's superficial approach to the inclusion of non-western photographers in the *Family of Man*. Her point is further clarified when one observes that out of the two hundred and fifty-six individually credited photographers, approximately twelve came from non-western cultures, Ray being one of them.[120]

In newly emergent post-colonial nation-states like India, *The Family of Man*'s association with the United Nation's vision of universal humanism cannot be ignored while assessing the exhibition. Being one of the forerunners of the Non-Aligned Movement, with a considerable presence in South Asian politics, India was a strategically important Asian country. It received considerable financial and technical aid from the US, UK, USSR, and GDR (and more) indicating that India was pivotal to Cold War cultural programming. Chapter two will delve deeper into India's strategic importance in the Cold War leading to American investment in rural development programs in the 1950s-60s. However, *The Family of Man* in India cannot just be limited only to US cold war propaganda and a homogenizing universal humanistic rhetoric. Tamar Garb in her essay on the reception of *The Family of Man* in South Africa reminds us that "the effects of The Family of Man in its many versions and lives cannot be limited to or conflated with the intentions or avowed ambitions of its curator or sponsors."[121] Steichen's exhibition in India needs to be studied for its role in elevating the status of photographic labour, funnelling aspirations of several aspiring photo-enthusiasts, and stirring an already dynamic photographic community, interrupting existing networks and establishing new ones. Through the example of the *Images of India* exhibition and the *Photographic Society of India*, I intend to argue that when *The Family of Man* came to India, it interjected an already dynamic local photography network, facilitated a rise in the status of photographic labour and coincided with a shift towards the modernist documentary style of photography.

The *Images of India* Exhibition

The *Images of India* exhibition was touted as the first single thematic display of "Indianness" in a photography exhibition by its curators. It took three years in making and was conceived as a

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[120] Estimate is drawn from Steichen and Sandburg, *The Family of Man*. Tīfentāle draws up a similar estimate, ibid. This is corroborated by the master list of the photographs in the exhibition on the Museum of Modern Art website. Sourced from https://www.moma.org/documents/moma_master-checklist_325962.pdf?_ga=2.28887230.366181988.1661859848-357987668.1658846339, on March 04, 2021.

[121] Garb, 'Rethinking Sekula from the Global South', 41.

'representative exhibition' intended to include the work of as many Indian photographers as possible. In its attempt to move away from the artistic genius of a few known photographers in India at that time, it brought together established names with new amateur photographers eager to display their work[122]. Organised through entries received in a photo contest, the *Images of India* can be understood through its association with photographic clubs operating at that time. We shall look at the nature of photography clubs more in detail towards the end of this chapter. The exhibition tried to cast a gigantic expanse for itself by trying to, in Chinwalla's words, "capture the Indian way of life, as it was in the ages past which revealed to the sculptural heritage, as it is with the realities of today and hopes of tomorrow". And while its primary motive was to represent 'life in India' through photographs, it prided itself in being representative of the post-colonial nation as well as the photographic work in India at that time. This inclination was emphasized in the curatorial decisions about the subjects depicted, and the photographs chosen, all of them structured towards including maximum photographers from India and showing a specific vision of 'what is India'. Curator Chinwalla disallowed a representation of the "visually repulsive areas of life", arguing "This was not going to be a sad documentation of life". His words reflect an intention to 'curate' a conscious and selective image of post-colonial India[123].

We are aware through Chinwalla's essay that there were differences between the gallery display and the portfolio printed in *Marg*[124]. Essentially, the photographs being discussed here, are doubly chosen – by the curator and then by *Marg* editor Mulk Raj Anand. Therefore, it is important to reflect on Mulk's presence in the whole process. In his introductory essay for the issue in *Marg*, Mulk refers to photography as the "folk art of the industrial age" which became a "form of expression for millions", a way for "man to find himself", direct compensation for the Industrial age where the worker is only a "cog in the machine". The special issue's self-described objective was to introduce "this new art form, *self-consciously"*, to give a "shock of awareness*"* to those who do not accept the validity of photographic art in India, through the *Images of India* portfolio reproduced in the issue. Given that *Marg* was often referred to as the "book magazine" where each issue aimed to offer a comprehensive overview of on particular topic,[125] an issue dedicated to elevating photography's status as fine art,

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[122] Though he does acknowledge that the exhibition was not an attempt to bring the finest photographers of the country together, but rather to raise photography to the fine art category, Chinwalla does ruefully lament the fact that several big photographers stayed away from the exhibition. See, Chinwalla, 'Contemporary Trends in Indian Photography', 18.

[123] Chinwalla supplements his declaration by adding that such (sad) documentation may be seen in the city sights and village ways section, but that happens as an 'inextricable part of the whole structure'. Ibid.

[124] For instance, while the original *Images of India* display was divided into six broad themes, the *Marg* portfolio was divided into thirteen themes. Ibid.,15-18.

[125] Deboo, 'Revisiting the Past'.

responded to those who, in Mulk's words were, "unwilling to accept cinema and photography" as art because of their "aristocratic subjectivism" and "antiquated mind". Mulk's words draw a clear distinction between those who are still stuck in the past, what he refers to as antiquated ideas of what should be art and those who saw photography as a medium connected to "science and contemporary expressions".[126] The *Images of India* exhibition was included as an illustrative example of photography's potential as an international language, of India's forward thrust as a nation and of *Marg* and Mulk's commitment to postcolonial nation-building, rooted in the international humanism of the time.

The images in the exhibition were seen by multiple audiences. Besides the main exhibition at the Jehangir Art Gallery in 1960, we are aware that the exhibition travelled to London for a show hosted by *The Royal Photographic Society*. One review by ID Wratten says, "if one wants to learn a little about India, this exhibition is the place from which one should start", suggesting at least one instance where the *Images of India* was acknowledged for representing India.[127] The show possibly travelled to other cities in India too, however, no research has been done on this and little is known.

Much like *The Family of Man*, the exhibition design for the *Images of India* was envisioned as a fully-fledged medium of expression, which generated an experience for the spectator. The curator became, in the words of Phillips, "an orchestrator of meaning", taking over from the photographer as an autonomous artist.[128] The transition from one theme to another was one way of structuring space and pacing the narrative of the exhibition. Stimson points out that the display of the *Family of Man* exhibition reflects the influence of Herbert Bayer's design principles such as a journalistic use of photographs de-emphasizing authorship, focussing on variations in scale, subject matter, and juxtaposition to dramatize broad and topical themes, an all-encompassing visual experience and authority of large-scale images.[129] Noticeably, curator Chinwalla seems to be impressed by these display methods. In his curatorial essay in *Marg*, he notes that the display is as important as the photographs. The lack of dynamism in individual photographs could be compensated by putting them in combination for a visual display. According to him, salon exhibitions at that time didn't quite do justice to the display of the photographic exhibitions, often destroying the display by using pins to hang

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[126] See, Anand, 'Photography as an Art Form', *Marg*, December 1960, 2-3.

[127] *The Royal Photographic Society Journal*, Volume 101, 140. Accessed from https://archive.rps.org/archive/volume-101/741279-volume-101-page-140?q=Images%20of%20India on April 14, 2021.

[128] Phillips, 'The Judgment Seat of Photography', 48.

[129] Stimson, *The Pivot of the World*, 80.

photographs on strings. Given that the curators of the *Images of India* saw it as an exhibition that would "revolutionise photographic exhibitions in India", its display was consciously understood to be different from other salon displays. This explains Chinwalla's decision for the photographs in the *Images of India* to be displayed at the Jehangir Art Gallery with formal prints and the use of lighting.[130]

Photographs in *The Family of Man* exhibition were broadly grouped to affirm the similarities of the people: such as clusters of images showing children being born, people dancing, playing a sport, couples falling in love and marriages. Utilising photography's universal appeal, the images were displayed only with the name of the photographer, not including specific captions or dates. As we saw earlier, this approach of using photographs as standalone 'phrases' separating them from historical and context specificity has been a major source of criticism for *The Family of Man*. The *Images of India* exhibition followed a similar pattern of the display, dividing the exhibition into six themes: Architecture and Sculpture, Work and Worship, Birth, Marriage and Death, womanhood, City Sights and Village Ways and Planning and Progress. The *Marg* portfolio (my archival source on this exhibition) is also divided into a cyclical range of universalising themes. Starting with Birth, Growth and Work, the exhibition moves onto themes like Rhythm, Festival, Women, Love, Marriage, Family and Faith, before ending with Pain, Death and finally a New Beginning.[131] In a bid to lay claims to photography's universalising potential at that time and possibly also to create a recall of the success of Steichen's show in India, the *Images of India* used a similar display, showcasing photographs with minimal information (such as photographer names), accompanied by religious and philosophical quotations.

Scattered archives and a lack of any sustained scholarship on the *Images of India* exhibition make it difficult for us to conclusively know the network of people who organised the exhibition. Though the *Marg* issue does not specify, there is some scholarship that associates the *Images of India* exhibition with a lesser-known photography club called the *Bombay Photographic Society/Association*.[132] In my interviews with photographers who were active in the photographic scene of the 1960s, there doesn't seem to be much recall about this club. There is an archival reference for a well-known photography club from the mid-1800s called the *Photographic Society of Bombay*.[133] While the names do sound

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[130] Chinwalla, 'Contemporary Trends in Indian Photography', 54.

[131] Since there is no conclusive information on the gallery display, we will refer to the thematic organisation and display order of the portfolio images reproduced in *the Marg* December 1960 issue.

[132] Gupta, '"Belatedness and Simultaneity', 33-35. Also, Gujral, 'Painters with a Camera (1968/69): In Search of an Indian Photography Exhibition', 47.

[133] Hapgood, *Early Bombay Photography*.

similar, there exist only two back issues of its journal, it seems unlikely that the *Bombay Photographic Society/Association* from 1960 has any connection to this club from the 1850s.[134]

What we do know for certain is that RJ Chinwalla, involved with the *Images of India* exhibition and JN Unwalla, whose article features in the *Marg* December 1960 issue, were both associated with the *Photographic Society of India* in Bombay (henceforth, the PSI) in the 1950-60s. Several documents from 1960 are missing in the PSI archives today, and yet from the available material, we know that Unwalla, a highly respected and well-known Pictorialist photographer, not only in Bombay but nationally and internationally, was one of the founding members of the PSI. In 1963, he became its President, taking over from KG Maheshwari. The exact nature of his involvement with the PSI in 1960, when the *Images of India* exhibition was set up, is not clear at the moment. It is possible that due to some internal differences in the PSI, he may have been distant from the club from 1958-1962 and organised the *Images of India* exhibition under the banner of a smaller club. In his curatorial essay, Chinwalla mentions that the exhibition did not have the support of several well-known photographic practitioners, which could be interpreted as further evidence cementing the above-speculated divide within the PSI.[135] However, it is difficult to say anything more conclusively. It is clear though that whether the *Images of India* was formally supported by the PSI or not, the latter continued to be an important meeting point for the people associated with the exhibition as well as a significant reference in the photographic scene of Bombay in that period. Conversely, PSI records reveal that from 1963 onwards (the year when Unwalla became the PSI President) they annually hosted regular 'Life in India' salons at the Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay the same exhibition venue where Steichen's *Family of Man* and later the *Images of India* was hosted.[136] It could be inferred from these details that the 'Life in India' Salons were possibly a direct inspiration from the success of the *Images of India* exhibition in 1960, which in turn was inspired by the *Family of Man* exhibition in Bombay in 1956. The PSI and the photographic community surrounding it, was thus, an important player in the broader network of the *Images of India* exhibition.

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[134] In my interviews with photographers, most had heard of the *Photographic Society of Bombay* but said that it possibly disintegrated much before 1960

[135] Chinwalla, 'Contemporary Trends in Indian Photography', 18.

[136] The Jehangir Art Gallery regularly hosted photographic salons and displays for the PSI in the 1950s, even before it hosted the internationally renowned *Family of Man.* PSI archives from June 1955 refer to the Jehangir Art Gallery as ideal for photography exhibitions. See, *Click*, June 1955. For more on the relevance of the Jehangir Art Gallery in the modern art discourse of post-colonial India, See, Gujral, 'Painters with a Camera (1968/69): In Search of an Indian Photography Exhibition', 45. Also, Gupta, 'The Promise of the Modern', 106-09.

The Photographic Society of India as a Scholarly Space: In Search of Local Networks that led to the *Images of India* Exhibition

Photography came to India almost immediately after its universal invention. By the turn of the century, there were several sporadic instances of alliances and networks of photo-enthusiasts across the three major metropolises Bombay, Kolkata and Madras. From the 1930s to the 1950s, the number of photography clubs in India grew exponentially, with new clubs spreading to smaller towns. While some of these clubs had special rules of access and admitted members upon discretion,[137] closer to independence, the majority of clubs were more democratic in their admission process and open to anyone interested in practising photography.[138]

Building on Bourdieu's sociological analysis of camera clubs in France, I want to argue that the emerging photography clubs in India functioned as a "scholarly" space for camera work,[139] which in the absence of formal photographic institutions, acted as a collective site for the advancement of photographic practice in the twentieth century (before and after 1947). These clubs, though non-official and not recognised by the government and dominant art schools of the time, had a huge membership of amateur hobbyist photographers and were explicit in their pedagogic intentions, seeing themselves as a space for engaging deeper with their collective 'love' for photography. Focussing attention on the PSI the photography club associated with Chinwalla and Unwalla, I will explore the networks that nurtured the collective aspirations of the people involved with the *Images of India* exhibition, attempting to uncover the formal and ideological contestations within which the *Images of India* took roots.

I am drawing on the archives of *Click*- the monthly magazine of the PSI, from a few years before the *Images of India* exhibition until a few years after, roughly from 1954 to 1967, to explore the nature of the club member's engagements with photography. However, the PSI archive in Bombay today only

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[137] Photography clubs with a pictorialist leaning such as the *Camera Pictorialists of Bombay* had strict rules of admission. Given their aspirations for photography to be recognised as fine art, exclusive access could be interpreted as one way of imitating the structures of social class intrinsic to bourgeoise fine art, as a way of claiming the same social status for photographic practitioners. See Unwalla, 'Indian Photography - 50 Years', *Marg*, December 1960, 6–7. Also, Bourdieu, *Photography*, 103–28.

[138] Jagdish Agarwal, phone interview, December 30, 2020.

[139] This term is used by Schnapper and Castel as they refer to the photography clubs as an 'engaged' space. See, Bourdieu, *Photography*, 124.

has some selected back issues. The archival material referenced is therefore not comprehensive, nor it is intended to be. Instead, my approach has been to investigate the available material in two orientations. First, what were the member's aspirations and expectations from the photography club? This broadly touches upon the discussion on photography as an international language in the period and its connection to universal humanism. Do the member's aspirations and interactions in the PSI overlap with photography's claim to universal humanism exhibited by *The Family of Man*? Second, in the context of the technocratic vision of the postcolonial state, how are the members of PSI relating to photographic technology? Given the nationalist concerns of the *Images of India*, what is the relationship of the photographers at the PSI with the nation's forward march and its technocratic ideas?

I will methodologically build on the work of Schnapper and Castel, who have made a case for studying the "behaviour" and "rules"[140] of camera clubs as a way of understanding the social aspirations involved with the photographic practice. Ganpathisundaram Thomas notes that there is a "good deal of interrelation between the social and the photographic scene".[141] While photography is "unable to establish an autonomous aesthetic of its own",[142] its pursuit within an engaged scholarly space like the PSI can be indicative of the social image of art and technology within the postcolonial period in India.

The Photographic Society of India: Alternate Site, Alternate Optics?

A camera club founded on 29th August 1937 at the suggestion of AJ Patel, PSI was formed at a public meeting chaired by CR Gerrard, the then director of the JJ School of Arts in Bombay, in the presence of twenty-six founding members. It was modelled on the lines of the Royal Photographic Society in London, as an institutional body and a 'parental figure' to guide amateur photographers and foster creative relationships within the photographic community in Bombay through lectures, exhibitions, demonstrations, outings, tours, and dinners.[143] One of its primary aims was to further photography as an art form. In the 1950s, it boasted five hundred plus members, the largest for any photography club

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[140] Bourdieu, 126.

[141] Thomas, *History of Photography, India, 1840-1980*, foreword.

[142] Bourdieu, *Photography*, 128.

[143] As noted by Homi Kharas, one of the founding members present at the first public meeting. Homi Kharas, 'Rules of the Game,' *Golden Jubilee Souvenir of the Photographic Society of India (1937-1987)*, 1987.

in India at that time. Most members had full-time jobs or careers in fields other than photography and joined the camera club to nurture photography as a hobby. Over time, some of the members left their full-time jobs to pursue photography professionally. Yet, most members continued to be hobbyist photographers for several years.[144]

Jagdish Agarwal, who joined the PSI as a young photographer in the 1960s, remembers the PSI as an "inclusive" space that facilitated "scholarly" discussion on photography, allowing those keen on practising photography to learn the technical aspects of the practice from their peers and senior photographers in the group. In the absence of formal institutions and training opportunities, spaces like the PSI functioned as sites where young photographers could learn the finer details of their craft.[145] Membership in the PSI can also be seen for its role in nurturing a sense of belonging through regular group events. Some of the popular events included 'first Friday of the month with models' where live models were invited to the PSI studio, and experimental evenings such as 'Trial by Jury' where a member's photograph was discussed by his peers who acted as a collective jury, regular member exhibitions and theme-based photographic contests. Besides the indoor events, outdoor tours, one day or long stay allowed the members to travel and photograph together.

[144] Another aspect that is known about the membership is that it was predominantly male. Studio evenings with nude models were much anticipated and saw high participation. *Click*, August 1954, 5. This fascination for nude portraits is also suggestive of an omnipresent aspiration for painting and the social status it holds. Castel and Schnapper note that the model of painting is omnipresent in the bourgeoise ideal of photography locating them in relation to what they cannot be. Bourdieu, *Photography*, 114.

[145] Jagdish Agarwal joined the PSI in 1967 and has continued to be a member. Beginning as a hobbyist photographer, he gradually pursued photography professionally and founded the *Dinodia Photo* library in the late 1980s. This information is from phone interviews conducted with him in December 2020.

Image 4: Anon., 'untitled', photograph from PSI member's outing, *Click*, March 1954, PSI, Mumbai.

'Scholarly' engagement with photography was furthered through lectures on topics such as photographic trade and the presence of photography in the art and film industry, besides other technical topics related to photography practice. Through its magazine *Click*, the PSI also circulated adverts for freelance work in industry and other income-generating avenues. Conversely, it also acted as a channel for various agencies requiring photographs on specific themes. Several members from the PSI and other clubs in India also presented their work in the Fédération internationale de l'art photographique (FIAP) which Tīfentāle describes as the progressive voice in the global photo-culture of the 1950-60s, suggesting the international associations of some of the group members.[146]

The magazine issues reveal a two-way dialogue with reader members often including articles exploring new possibilities of composition and framing while critiquing standard practice and rules. For instance, an article by MV Vijaykar discusses the dilemma of photographing tall pine trees, critiquing the judging process and the definition of what is a good composition:

> *They are so tall that if a photographer tries to include their bases their tops go out of the picture and vice versa. A photograph showing 'fault' if submitted to the judgement of a jury of selection for an exhibition, it is likely to receive short shrift from the judges who are generally bound by the so-called rules of composition... May I ask these judges in all seriousness whether it is necessary to be so factual and include in the picture all the various details of a*

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146 Tifentāle, 'The "Olympiad of Photography', 60–83.

scene observed. Cannot something be left to the imagination of those who may view the photograph?[147]

Further, he gives an example of an aerial shot of a man which shows more details than a frontal shot. However, this detailed aerial shot, according to the author, shows unnecessary details – the subject's bald head, dry hair and so on. He further reiterates his point that showing details is not always necessary and good composition cannot be defined in terms of 'detail' in the photograph, reprimanding the judges who reject a picture based on "some outworn and imaginary rule of composition that has outlived its day*"*.[148]

The author's comments suggest members' involvement in debating the rules of standardised photography practice and rethinking the basics of photography. This was not a lone article. Several articles similarly express strong opinions on the internal working of the club. Common topics include criticism of the club's obsession with exhibitions, sharing different opinions on the judging process, lamenting the deteriorating standard of prints submitted in the exhibitions, and lack of new themes and topics in the photographs sent as exhibition entries. Many articles discuss the future of the club, how not to stagnate, possible ways of being more active and effective throughout the year, sometimes giving suggestions like making smaller groups, putting pictures on the display board, asking the managing committee to be more open towards member's suggestions and so on.[149] The constant back and forth between the previous articles written, references to remarks heard at one of the PSI group events and engaging with these remarks through the article, referring to contemporary trends and responding to anticipated criticism; all of it suggests a space where members were deeply invested in the participatory dynamics of the club as well as in exploring the evolving technologies of photography. The PSI in the 1950s was a growing community, engaged, scholarly and also competitive in its pursuit of photography.[150]

This scholarly impulse of photography clubs is further seen in the discussions on photographic technology. Referring back to Vijaykar's article, his comments are more than a critique of

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[147] *Click,* June 1956, 16.

[148] Ibid., 18.

[149] *Click*, date not known, 6.

[150] I use the word 'competitive' in reference to the several discussions in *Click* on exhibitions, award winners, criticism of the jury process, dissatisfaction with the decisions and explanations given by the jury when faced with criticisms.

compositional rules followed in the club. It implies a deliberation on photography's role as a recording device, a technical apparatus. His comments touch upon the question of value and aesthetics in photography, reflecting on what is a 'good' photograph. Is it about using the technology of the camera to capture all the 'details' one can see with the human eye, or something else? While acknowledging the technological nature of photography and its limitations (inability to capture the whole length of a pine tree), Vijaykar locates photographic creativity in the ability to manipulate the limitations of the machine rather than succumb to them. He recommends, "show the top of the tree without the root" asking the audience to "imagine" what the trunk and roots would look like. His suggestion touches upon the element of imaginative labour as a part of the photographic production, on behalf of the photographer and interestingly, even the spectator.

In another article, TR Babu discusses the differences between the human eye (with a narrow angle of vision) and the mechanical eye of the camera with a wider angle of vision. The eye of the camera records everything it sees, unable to exercise selectivity and focus like the human eye. The author suggests that this gap can be overcome only when a photographer can "train his eye to see approximately what his lens would record".[151] This could be done by choosing to either go close to the subject, or by using framing and composition techniques which allow the photographer to selectively focus only on what he wants in the frame, or by creating a depth of field which can draw attention to certain parts of the photographic subject and take attention away from certain other parts; again, touching on the domain of physical and imaginative labour that is an element of any creative practice.

In both the examples discussed above, there is an acknowledgement of the technological basis of photography and its limits – a lens that cannot capture the top *and* the bottom of a tall pine tree in the first case, and the wide angle of the camera lens which captures everything it sees, without exercising any selectivity, in the second case. In each, the respective authors see value in the photographer's creativity, understood as his ability to work *through* the limits of technology. The mechanical eye of the camera is embraced as a material condition of photographic technology and seen as a 'means' for channelising the photographer's artistic creativity.

A range of modernist photographic tendencies that developed throughout Europe in the 1920s, collectively referred to as 'New Vision', according to S Edwards, used the technical limitations of the camera to produce a new aesthetic where it was common for photographers to see themselves *as* the

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151 *Click*, July-August 1958, 6.

camera. By anticipating the properties of the camera that shaped the image, the photographers, attempted to develop a photographic vision.[152] A similar attempt can be seen here, with the photographers re-assessing their relationship to photographic technology in the 1950s. Despite the technocratic utopia that was interwoven in the postcolonial nationalist and transnational narratives of the 1950s, these conversations reveal an evolution of the relationship between aesthetics and technology based on a creative re-assessment of the medium. As a site of collective scholarly engagement, the PSI generated alternative optics to the technocratic vision of the developmental modernist state as well as to the scepticism of the camera's mechanical optics exhibited by formal art institutions in the 1950s.

In the limited scholarship on post-colonial photography of that period, the late adoption of the study of photography is attributed to a conception of photography as disembodied and mechanical, built on an inherent lack. Artists from the formal art schools took time to shed their baggage of formal pedagogic training and were slow in acknowledging photography as an independent medium whose trajectory was distinct from painting and other fine arts. The shift in this conception is attributed to seven artists from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Baroda, who tried to engage with the camera's ability to access what was not available to the eye, in the exhibition *Painters With a Camera* in 1968/69. Diva Gujral argues that this exhibition in the late 1960s "turned the status of the camera as a 'mere tool' on its head", celebrating the photographic plane as a site of physical and imaginative labour, disrupting the mechanical expectations of camera apparatus through manual intervention.[153]

However, as we have seen, in the 1950s, amateurs and hobbyists from photography clubs who were not formally trained and pursued the medium out of sheer interest and curiosity, had already embraced photographic technology. As evident from the writing of Vijaykar and Babu (from 1956 and 1958 respectively), the camera was not considered a 'mere' tool. Its legitimacy was not questioned and the anxiety around the camera displayed by the formal art institutions before 1968/69, finds no place here. Photographer TNP Singh writing for the *Marg* in December 1960 acknowledges that the limitations of photographic technology, like size and lack of colour, made photographers feel inferior compared to painters in the 'past' when photography was still judged by the same yardstick as painting. However, by the mid-1950s, even before *The Family of Man* arrived in India, we can gauge a palpable element of

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[152] Edwards, 'Photography and Photomontage in the USSR and Germany', 402–5.

[153] For Gujral's discussion on the late adoption of photography in art institutions, Gujral, 'Painters with a Camera (1968/69)', 50–51. While Gujral sees the photo artists of the 1968-69 exhibition as the pioneers of a shift in Indian photography, moving away from the anxiety of its mechanical existence to embracing it, I disagree with that view. The signs of this shift can be amply seen in the discussions and practice of amateur photographers from the PSI in the 1950s.

self-recognition among amateur photographers, who are acknowledging their status as creative artists, creatively tweaking the mechanical nature of photography. Photography is recognised and celebrated as a different form, to be assessed by a criterion different from painting and other non-mechanical arts.[154] The articles in *Click* reveal a sustained and intense engagement with the technical and creative aspects of photography, embracing the medium, redefining creativity through the mechanics of the camera, and shedding away anxieties related to the mechanical 'eye'.

In chapters two and three, we will discuss in the detail the developmental modernist optics of the post-colonial state under Nehru. These optics generated by the state was technocratic in their aspiration of order and mechanical precision and saw technology as a utopic remedy for all challenges that were socially, historically, and politically generated. Seen in this context, the members of the PSI seem to profess a conceptualisation of technology different from the state vision. There is no longer a fascination with technology nor a celebration of the utopia it offers. It is merely a material medium upon which a photographer builds his photographic practice. This can be further illustrated through the writing of Shama Kilanjar, who explains the 'technique' of using the emerging technology of colour to create moods in a photograph. For him, "The yellow filter brings out textures in the skin, and clouds in the sky. If more emphasis on the clouds is necessary, the orange filer does a more dramatic job…a subject can be virile and flaming if red is emphasised, or soft and touching if it is blue".[155] Embracing colour as the new technology redefining photographic practice at that time, Kilanjar offers suggestions on how it can be used imaginatively. This mode of imaginative engagement with technology can be seen in parallel to Otto Steinert's subjective photography movement in 1950s Germany. Phillips notes that the practitioners of this subjective photography movement saw photography as a vehicle for the reaffirmation of an inner experience, an exercise of inner creativity.[156]

The scholarly space for camera work opened by the PSI can therefore be studied for the alternative optics it generated, where photography's mechanical apparatus was neither rejected nor celebrated. Its material existence is neither the source of anxiety nor projected as a modernist cure. The comparisons with painting were also rejected in favour of an independent trajectory of the medium.[157] The emphasis

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[154] T Narindra Paul Singh, *Marg*, 1960, 57-58.

[155] Shama Kilanjar, 'The Amateur and his Camera,' *Marg*, December 1960, 12-13.

[156] Phillips, 'Resurrecting Vision', 107.

[157] Schnapper and Castel argue that the exclusion of photography from the painting traditions makes it possible to detach itself from its 'bourgeoise' use. This logic can be extended to argue that the exclusion

is on the imaginative ability of the photographer to masterfully utilise the technology of the camera to get the desired photograph. This is inclusive of the physical labour put in by the photographer in the process of creating a photograph and producing its print in the dark room, as well as the imaginative labour involved in this process. In the words of well-known Pictorialist photographer Kasi Nath, "if he [the photographer] learns to see and think in terms of photography and develops a photographic sense, then he will find for himself what it is that makes a good picture and how to make it."[158] Assimilating the new vision of the camera and seeing *as* the camera was not enough. The photographer from the club was asked to 'think photographically', suggesting a merging of the technocratic optic and a creative imaginative optic - 'see and think photographically'. The mechanical presence of photographic technology was thus incorporated into the realm of imaginative labour essential for artistic practice.

For the Pleasure of it!

The amateur photographer in the clubs was celebrated as the one who photographs "solely for the love of it".[159] Schnapper and Castel see the amateur photographic practice in photography clubs as an effort to, "refuse to affirm to be markers and consumers",[160] whether by choosing to engage in photography other than family photographs or by refusing to take up photography as a full-time profession. To add to this, it is also important to make a distinction between amateur photographers and those who take to photography as an artistic pursuit after formal artistic training in other arts and are a part of the network of commercial art, gallery space and the market dynamics of the art exchange. Artists who were drawn to photography from 1968/69 onwards (as discussed above) belonged to that broader network of commercial art practice.[161] Photography clubs as the "focal point" of amateur activity[162] in the 1950s were alternative spaces to seek pleasure and happiness through mastery of *technique*. This aspiration

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of photographic writing from the canons of postcolonial art history has allowed photography to flourish in the margins. For a detailed discussion on the imposition of painting on photography and its separation, see Bourdieu, *Photography*, 113.

[158] Kasi Nath, 'What is a good photograph?' *Marg*, 1960, 55.

[159] Kilanjar, 'Amateur,' *Marg*, 11.

[160] Bourdieu, *Photography*, 103.

[161] A case in point is Jyoti Bhatt, who was already a well-known painter by the time he started experimenting with photography. He was awarded the National Award for Painting in 1956 by the Government of India.

[162] Kilanjar, 'Amateur,' *Marg*, 14.

for pleasure is expressed repeatedly in *Click* issues from the 1950s and can perhaps best be explored through the ongoing conversations and resulting overlaps between the Pictorialists and Modernists.

The *Camera Pictorialists of Bombay*, set up in 1932, included prominent names from the Bombay photographic community.[163] The PSI, formed five years later, was influenced by the work of the *Camera Pictorialists of Bombay* and shared many common members, including JN Unwalla. As a staunch Pictorialist, Unwalla emphasized the pleasure impulse in photography. In his words, "Picture making is the task of capturing Beauty through Truth... if you are an artist by nature- you will always see the beauty in nature and will want to record that impression of the beauty you saw and the pleasure you received from it."[164] This impulse to seek pleasure from photography was thus present within the PSI since its inception in the late 1930s.

The anti-colonial nationalist struggle in the 1940s coincided with nationalist aspirations among the photography clubs. This aspiration for a national character was expressed in multiple ways - sometimes through a desire for a national alliance, sometimes in the desire for photography to attain a nationalist form,[165] and at other times, in the desire to contribute to the developing national visualisation of the time.[166] Thomas notes the instrumentality of the 'Postal Portfolio' movement started by United Province Amateur Photographic Association under Syed Hyder Hussian Razavi, which later transformed into the '1940 Portfolio circle' allowing photographers from different regions to send photographs through post[167]. As India became an independent nation-state in 1947, the camera clubs, enthusiastic about a 'national' presence, invited members from different regions to enrol and seek membership. However, these nationalist aspirations for a national alliance encompassed several internal contradictions. Efforts

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[163]Thomas notes that the group was known for its disavowal of mainstream photographers Thomas, *History of Photography, India, 1840-1980,* 43.

[164] Unwalla, 'Indian Photography', *Marg*, December 1960, 7.

[165] This aspiration can be seen in Unwalla's writing in Marg December 1960 issue, when he expresses hope that photography will attain a nationalist form with time, while lamenting how that had not happened in the decade after independence. See, Unwalla, 'Indian Photography', 5.

[166] The PSI was encouraging its members to produce work for the nation in the post-independence period. An advert from PSI archival collection asks the reader, "would you like to help the country to achieve better understanding of us with the countries of the outside world?", situating itself within the nationalist and transnational economies of photographic exchange in the period.

[167] Thomas, *History of Photography*, 47.

by A Arunachalam and AJ Pandian in the South failed to pique the interest of camera clubs in North India.[168] The way forward through these contradictions, as Thomas notes, was to acknowledge that:

> *the very idea of a 'unitary' type of National Photographic Society was a non-starter… it would have been sacrilegious to smother them (existing photography clubs) by offering them a single, unitary National alternative. Politically too, the 'federal' idea was very much in the air, and so, it was but natural to think up a Federation of Camera Clubs, which while providing concerted unity at the centre, would, at the same, ensure that autonomy of the various clubs.*
> *169*

Building on this thought of federal structure, an alliance recognising the individuality of each of the photography clubs was formed which brought together existing Portfolio Circles. This idea of federal alliance continued to grow and in 1953 was established as the *Foundation of Indian Photography*.[170] Thomas' explanation can be seen as an attempt to acknowledge the fragmented nature of nationalist aspirations within the photography clubs in the 1950s. These internal contradictions within the photography alliances of the time are also obliquely referred to by *Images of India* curator Chinwalla in the *Marg* issue. The *Images of India* exhibition emerging from a space of these dissonances, as we have seen already, was rooted in the historical specificities of its time.

The national and transnational political climate of the late 1940s and early 1950s saw many photographers taking to what was then known as the 'modernist' documentary style, as a way of making sense of the chaos of the present moment. The rise of documentary photography in the PSI circle can be traced to the growing influence of Henri Cartier Bresson, *Life* magazine and a younger generation of amateur photographers who prioritised the present moment and saw the purpose of photography in its ability to communicate a message. This turn towards documentary photography was grounded in the universal humanist ethos of the post-war world. Within the PSI, several members preferred the pictorial values of beauty over what they saw as a "sad documentation of life"[171] disregarded the work of modernist photographers. At the same time, with the success of *The Family of Man* and a growing trend towards humanist values furthered by the United Nations, there was a slow realisation that the modernist documentary medium was the future of photographic practice in India and internationally. The PSI in the 1950s was gearing up for a generational shift with the senior founder members (with Pictorialist

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[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid., 51.

[170] Ibid., 47.

[171] Unwalla, 'Indian photography,' 8.

inclinations) revealing an anxiety about being forgotten. Unwalla's article from 1960 reflects this anxiety. "Many of the readers may not be aware of the battles the older generation of photographers have fought and won to gain a place for photography along with the other arts", he writes.[172] Some of their resistance to documentary may also be attributed to their desire for relevance.

The new documentary style of photography at the PSI emerged within and from the existing pictorial ethos. It was, therefore, inclusive of Pictorialist ideas of beauty and pleasure, carrying them into the social sphere. The documentary idiom was seen as capable of moving beyond the photography-for-personal pleasure idiom to seek pleasure in connection with the viewer, by telling a story through photographs and "moving" the viewer.[173] The divide between the Pictorialists and documentary photographers was less of a break and more of a slow gradual transition with each side informed and transformed by the other. Within the archives of *Click*, one can see an attempt to address this slow transition of the documentary medium emerging from the pictorial ethos and the Pictorialists reluctantly accepting the documentary idiom. Rustom Mehta's writing reflects on changes in ideas of photographic technologies in that period and attempts to address the exchange between Pictorialists and the Modernists.

> *...the photographer with the true modern spirit believes in revealing the truth... photography is an art – an art that reveals the truth of the world around, the truth of human existence, the foibles and frailties of men and women... let your photography be modern in the sense that it enables you to capture the world of daily life....*

Truth is the category used to address the presence of the modern in photographic language. Here, we see Mehta engage with the idea of truth not just as a social reality, but also as a personal individualised quest, touching on the pictorial ideas of pursuing truth through beauty, as discussed earlier in Unwalla's writing. Reflecting further on this pictorial value of 'personalisation' in modern photography, he adds:

> *Little can be said about the selection of the subject matter, for that is a very personal thing... in every scene of action, whether natural or posed, there is a 'telling moment'. Every great photographer should have an instinctive understanding". The pictorial work ethic is lauded here, when he says, "the person who longs to be a great photographer...must development ... his creative faculties, any powers of imagination that he may possess...knowledge of basic compositional principles and a mastery of photographic technique.*

A modern photographer, according to Mehta, needed to learn the Pictorialist rigours of form and composition to produce pictures which "arouse satisfaction in the beholder" and combine it with the

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[172] Ibid., 9.

[173] Harbans Chadha, 'What is a good photograph,' *Marg*, December 1960, 56.

spontaneity and urgency of the documentary style.[174] This mix of values, which he refers to as the "pictorialism of today" or modern photography was an intrinsic part of the conversations among photographers at the PSI. The rise of documentary photography in postcolonial India must be seen as fuelled by the contradictions and negotiations between the new age Modernists and the old school Pictorialists. Photography clubs like the PSI offered a collective and scholarly space that nurtured this mix of values. Archives reveal that the 1950-60s were the decades when these ideas of Pictorialism and documentary were in flux, taking shape gradually. The conversations reveal the amateur photographer's attempts to engage with a peculiar mix of pictorialism and documentary generated by the multiple influences at the PSI while being embroiled in the nationalist contradictions and transnationalist aspirations of their time. They also reveal anxiety about keeping up with new and constantly evolving photographic technologies while simultaneously holding onto an excitement of photography being recognised as a distinct world language. Their contradictions also suggested anxiety about the future, the uneasiness of the new replacing the old.

Through this transition period, the element of pleasure remains foundational to the work of the photographers in the PSI. While pleasure germinated within the photographic discourse through the Pictorialist lexicon, it continued to flourish through the transition years in the 1950s. The documentary photographers added new layers to their pleasurable pursuit of photography, redefining enjoyment through an external subject, whose story was important to tell, and which had the potential to 'move' the viewer. Both these desires also seem to co-exist in the issues of *Marg*. Annapurna Garimella notes Mulk's desire to seek "pleasure" in the beauty of visual art[175] as well as its ability to touch the lives of people and speak to its time. The *Images of India* exhibition and its reproduction in *Marg* by Mulk, can be seen for its lineage in the Pictorialist and modernist genres of photography and the transitionary period of the late 1950s-early 1960s where both these impulses coexisted and informed each other.

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[174] For the whole discussion, see Rustom Mehta, 'The Pictorialism of Today: Random Thoughts on Modern Photography,' *Click*, March-August 1967, 13-15.

[175] Garimella, *Mulk Raj Anand, 23*.

SECTION II

The image of the postcolonial state in the *Images of India* exhibition

What did it mean to refashion Steichen's ideas and apolitical vision of "meta-photography" in postcolonial India?[176] The year 1960 has to be seen within the broader context of the aftermath of the 1947 partition of South Asia, the overwhelming state impetus towards developmental modernist ideas, the declining optimism that accompanied the failures of the Five-Year Plans in India and the transnational politics of the Cold War. Most formal art institutions until 1960 were still wary of photography's mechanical apparatus and hesitant to explore its artistic possibilities. Photographic practice, however, was thriving through a dynamic network of amateur photography clubs in different parts of India. Within this broader context, how was the inspiration triggered by the arrival of *The Family of Man* in India reshaped by Chinwalla and others associated with the *Images of India* exhibition? What local impulses and historical contradictions were incorporated in this revised response to the *Family of Man*? How was photography as a 'universal language', reworked through the local and national roots of the *Images of India* exhibition? As will be seen through the discussion on the networks of the *Images of India* exhibition, despite many similarities with *The Family of Man*, it offers a more reflexive and layered approach to universal humanism and nationalism. In doing so, it emerges as a monumental postcolonial photo-essay, which, unlike Steichen's affirmative and universalist exhibition, elaborates a locally rooted, nationalist way of seeing and defining India, anchoring itself in a range of conflicting and politically diverse experiences.

One metaphor for India after 1947 was that of a newly born child, one that arrived through a violent and bloody partition, one that was orphaned soon after, with its *Father*, Gandhi, being assassinated and, one that was predestined to undertake a long futuristic march towards a foretold destiny (of greatness). The *Images of India* exhibition interestingly begins the story of India through a thematic section on 'Birth' depicting three photographs (Image 5). In a clockwise direction starting from the left page, the first photograph shows four infants deep in sleep, about to be awakened to the rude reality of the world they are born into. The second photograph depicts a calf, valued in Hindu scriptures for its innocence and purity, suckling from its mother. The third photograph at the bottom on the right side also depicts a similar image, with the infant happily suckling her mother, oblivious of the world outside.

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[176] James, *Common Ground*, 54.
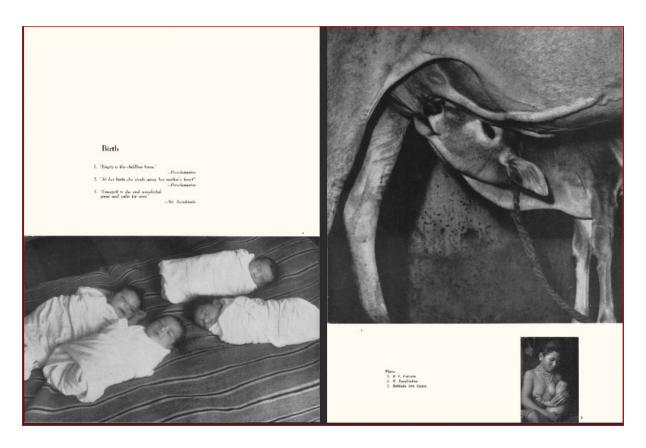
Image 5: BF Ferreira, N Ramakrishna and Rabindu Sengupta, 'Birth', magazine spread with three photographs, Plate 1, 2 and 3, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the invention of India as ancient and traditional was as important to nation-building, as going forward and developing. However, interestingly, the *Images of India* exhibition capture *the Birth* of India through metaphors of infancy.[177] Acknowledging the image of a calf and its subtle connection to Hinduism, I also want to read this page spread as a deliberate choice made by Chinwalla and Mulk to photographically imagine postcolonial India as an infant, starting its journey of life – moving forward. My interpretation draws on the scholarship on Mulk, which situates him and *Marg* in a futuristic role. For instance, Geeta Kapur notes that "Mulk was a utopian modernist in the 1920s-30s. Over the years, He adapted that spirit to his subsequent Indian commitment, and maintained some form of its energy throughout." Mulk also subscribed to a "humanist" thought, that gave humanism a "world-historical urgency" in the decolonising movement. Similar to Tamar Garb's arguments discussed earlier, humanism for *Marg* and Mulk was articulated quite differently from Steichen's definitions. Humanism was an opportunity to reclaim the rights of the colonised across the

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[177] Childhood was imagined as a universal condition in a world needing a fresh start after the end of the War in 1945. For the post-colonial Indian nationalists, the child-young state metaphor allowed them to rearticulate their developmental visions in pedagogic terms. For further reference, see Sriprakash, Sutoris, and Myers, 'The Science of Childhood and the Pedagogy of the State'.

world. As Kapur notes, he was a believer in "New Asia" which for him was more potent than "Old Europe", suggesting the new possibilities generated by India's independence and the possible decolonial alliances. The decision to depict birth through photographs of infants can be seen as a reflection of this urge to align with a global "humanism" similar to *The Family of Man*, but from a decolonial perspective rooted in the Indian visual idiom.[178] Kapur notes that Mulk's belief in universal humanism transcended "histories of imperial domination", with a focus on socialist brotherhood "whereby humanism may keep the liberal aspect of its origins but recognise the claim of democracy to represent the disenfranchised poor".[179]

Going further, I want to explore two projections of the postcolonial state seen through the *Images of India* exhibition: an image of linear forward progression overlapping with the broader modernist idiom of the time (projected as a self-image of the state), and an image of static circularity (projected on its indigenous citizens).

Let us first discuss the image of linear forward progression, which I refer to as the 'optics of linearity'. Image 6 by Pramod Pati is a full-page photograph showing bare-chested, dhoti-clad men, presumably labourers, walking in a straight line that angularly divides the photographic frame.[180] This photograph is taken from a lower angle, making it appear as if the viewer is 'looking up' at the men. The grass they are walking on has been framed at an inclined angle, giving an 'upward' directionality to the walk within the frame.

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[178] Mulk was also a part of the movement of Afro-Asian writers in the late 1950s and a connection with several Asian, African and Latin American intellectuals and artists. See Geeta Kapur's essay on Partisan Modernity in Garimella, *Mulk Raj Anand*, 36.

[179] This discussion is informed by Geeta Kapur's arguments. Ibid., 29-30.

[180] Pati was trained as an animator and made several experimental short films for the Films Division in the 1960s. One of his popular films was 'This is our India' (1961), an animated short using the 'voice of God' style on the success of the Five-Year Plans.

Image 6: Pramod Pati, 'untitled', photograph showing laborers walking forward, Plate 11, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.
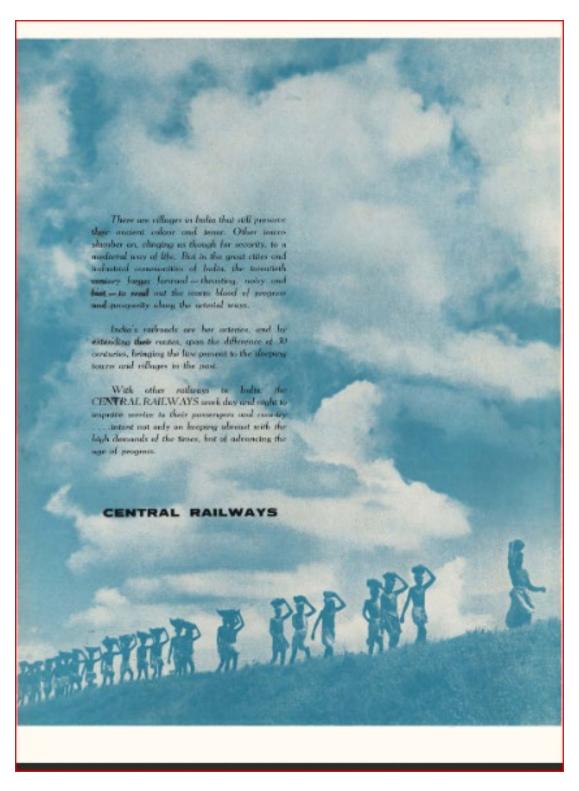
Image 7: Pramod Pati, advertisement by Central Railways, unpaginated colour photograph, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

This image was reused in a Central Railways advertisement of the same issue of *Marg*, this time in colour and accompanied by a text (Image 7).

The text reads:

> *... the twentieth century forges forward – thrusting, noisy and fast – to send out the warm blood of progress and prosperity along the arterial ways…the CENTRAL RAILWAYS work day and night to improve service to their passengers and country…. Intent not only on keeping abreast with the high demands of the times, but of advancing the age of progress.*

Paired with Pati's image of men walking 'forward' to a higher destination, the text refers to a progression or forward movement. This illusion of moving forward is achieved through serialisation and repetition of similar motifs. Framing the walk through an inclined angle, both images above hint at a gradual upward progression. This upward/forward movement is further supported by the movement *within* the frame. This is not a static frame with people frontally facing the lens, giving an impression of a pause (for the camera). Rather, this is a frame that is moving, in a way that the men (presumably labourers) appear to be walking through the frame and out from the right edge, towards a goal that is unseen in the present but belongs to a pre-decided future that is temporally and spatially distant from this frame. De Vries draws on Ferguson and Escobar to remark on the 'endless' desire for development despite its persistent failures.[181] As noted in the Introduction, Sankaran Krishna has also written about the continuous suspension integral to the postcolonial logic of deference. The nation exists in the future, and as a patriotic duty, the citizens were expected to work towards it. In the post-partition context, this element of 'working for the future' was often highlighted by the state. This act of nation-building involved an 'endless' toil and a 'forward march' without complaining about the working conditions in the absence of any visible outcomes.[182] In Nehru's own words:

> *To hell with the man who cannot walk fast. Serves him right if he falls out of the ranks and falls out. We want no sluggards. We want no slow people who always complain about their service conditions and their transfers and so on… service condition and salary and status may be important, but I want* **work, work, and work** *[my emphasis] … I want achievement, I want men who work as crusaders… I want you to build up India…*[183]

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[181] De Vries, 'Don't Compromise Your Desire for Development! A Lacanian/Deleuzian Rethinking of the Anti-Politics Machine', 34-37.

[182] This point is a reference to Nehru's disdain towards striking workers, who he believed 'slowed down' the monumental task of nation-building. *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, series nine, 70; anon., 'we cannot afford strikes,' *Yojana*, July 28, 1957, 1. For a general reading on strikes in India, Karnik, *Strikes in India*; Joshi, 'Histories of Indian Labour'; Das, 'The Nehru Years in Indian Politics'.

[183] From a plaque in the Bhakra Dam Museum, Nangal, Himachal Pradesh, as seen in January 2019. In the backdrop of a partitioned Punjab, the Bhakra Dam was a symbol of post-colonial India's developmental modernist vision. This will be discussed in chapter three. These excerpts from Nehru's quote validate the point being made here.

It is this repetitive toil and (fast) movement toward the future that I wish to define as the 'linear optics of the newly formed nation-state. Through similar-looking bodies, photographed doing the same action, the effect here is to amplify the repetitive nature of the work, which again contributes to an aesthetic of constant work/movement. The citizens of the new nation were not allowed to merely inherit their 'Indianness' but had to constantly work on becoming authentic citizens, worthy of their 'Indian' status. This serialisation and repetition of form to indicate a forward movement can be observed across many ocular registers of that period.

Image 8: Anon., 'untitled', Community Development workers, photograph, *Yojana*, March 1957, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, New Delhi.

Image 9: Anon., 'Community Development Work', photograph, *Yojana*, March 1957, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, New Delhi.

Image 10: Anon., 'Muscles Can Do It', photograph, *Yojana*, March 1957, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, New Delhi.

I want to bring examples of similar visual metaphors from *Yojana*, a monthly magazine on 'Development', published by the Government of India since 1957. Image 8 is carried in the magazine with a text discussing the life of a village worker involved in rural development projects. As we will see in chapter two, rural development schemes in the 1950s were built on the idea of an inherent backward lag in village society and progress as filling up this 'lag', through developmental projects. This image refers to the labour of these workers in developmental reconstruction programs. The text of the article highlights the relentless nature of their work, projecting them as filled with optimism to working toward "something big". The article carrying this photograph reads "…And so his day ends. Probably he is physically tired, but he is happy in the thought that he is participating in something big. Soon another day will dawn…another day of dedication and service…". This 'something big' is the vague and abstract future, absent from each of these photographic frames, but referred to as the final destination of this forward movement. Visualising this, the image above depicts a line of village-level workers cutting the photographic frame into a diagonal half, using the repetitive form of a marching developmental worker gazing into a distant space outside the photographic frame, to indicate forward movement and the endless nature of work essential for nation-building. Using the depth of the image at an inclined angle, Image 8 successfully projects an emerging (and moving) queue of workers, further exemplifying the linear optics of the postcolonial state. Images 9 and 10, also from *Yojana* magazine, can be seen as further examples of this linear optic.

Further, this linear projection of the state is complemented through a dialectical projection of its citizens as static (not moving forward). Srirupa Roy argues that the statist imagination produces 'citizenship as lack'[184] as "the needy nation was an expression of faith in the future."[185] As photography became of one the tools to project the nation of the future, linearity and (forward) movement projected through the medium existed alongside the contemporary optics of the "troubled present".[186] Throughout the dissertation, I have attempted to discuss the multiple manifestations of this troubled present – the Introduction discussed the anxieties around the partition, and the second chapter will discuss the projection of the village through a developmental lag. Here, I want to explore the portrayal of indigenous communities in the *Images of India* exhibition to argue that their encryption in a cultural and visible diversity constitutes the centralised unity of the Indian state. A static-circular form used to represent the indigenous groups dialectically validates the linear optics we have discussed.

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[184] Roy, *Beyond Belief*, 22.

[185] Ibid., 165.

[186] Ibid., 130.

Diversity in official imagination was articulated through several criteria such as natural diversity, territorial diversity, ethnic diversity and so on. These definitions were built on the imagination of India as a composite of different regions, each a product of its own distinct culture. Together, they all aggregated to cumulatively produce the 'national culture'.[187] Culture was seen as natural, marked visibly through distinct costumes, jewellery, folk dances and so on. As Srirupa Roy notes, official nationalism recognises diversity as obvious, lending itself to immediate sensorial perception, especially the 'visual gaze'.[188] Possible internal differences are overlooked, and group identity is consolidated by emphasizing the sameness of a group with its own members, and its distinctiveness from others. This allows groups that can demonstrate their ethnic differences through 'visible, cultural' factors to be accommodated within the official nationalist discourse of Indianness. Their ocular uniqueness as fragments that stand out because of their diversity but are united by the paternal institutions of the state, is an essential part of the 'unity in diversity' formula.[189] This idea of non-contradictory diversity can be read in association with the universal humanist ideas of the period, which celebrated differences without addressing the context or its internal contradictions. Image 11 and Image 12 depict members of tribal ethnic groups wearing their 'traditional' clothes and jewellery, representing themselves as 'authentic' representatives of their culture in front of the camera. This vision is reverberated by Chinwalla when he describes the *Images of India* as a composite representation of India that encapsulated a common unity in the midst of bewildering diversity.[190]

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[187] Such a conception of diversity excluded political divergences in regions such as the Naga movement or the Kashmiri demand for a plebiscite. Sarkar, 'Popular Movements and National Leadership, 1945-47'; Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*; Puri, *Kashmir towards Insurgency*; Kikon, 'Engaging Naga Nationalism'.

[188] Roy, 'Instituting Diversity: Official Nationalism in Post-independence India', 96. Roy adds this diversity, besides being 'cultural', was also perceived as 'natural' seen through differences in topography, natural resources and flora and fauna, further making itself accessible to visual perception. This articulation of diversity as 'regional, cultural and natural' has roots in colonial imagination which saw the Indian society as a "collection of discrete groups or communities that could be separated out from each other and measured in terms of their numerical strength". Roy referring to Cohn and Appadurai, Ibid., 81.

[189] Ibid. A good example of this is seen in the annual Republic Day Parades at Delhi. See Roy, 'Marching in Time: Republic Day Parades and the Ritual Practices of the Nation-State,' in *Beyond Belief, 66-105.* Also see, Mukherjee, 'Spectacular India'.

[190] Chinwalla, 'Contemporary Trends in Indian Photography'.

Image 11: Shobha Janah, Sunil Janah and BF Fereira, 'Rhythm', magazine spread with three photographs, Plate 12, 13 and 14, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

Detail of Plate 12

Detail of Plate 14

Image 12: AS Edwin, 'untitled', Plate 20, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

Plate 12 (on the left page) in Image 11 is credited to Shobha Janah, the only Indian woman photographer in this portfolio.[191] It depicts a group wearing traditional clothes easily recognisable as 'indigenous', captured in the act of dancing with musical instruments. The facial features of the group suggest that this picture must have been taken in the northeastern area. Adjacent to this photograph is a photograph taken by her husband Sunil Janah[192], depicting young girls donned in traditional attire standing in a circle. Again, the visible attributes like dress and jewellery indicate their 'indigenous' status. The relationship of the developmental modernist state with the indigenous groups who ancestrally owned resource-rich land in the country has been of a turbulent kind. Kaushik Ghosh writes that the developmental state's approach towards the indigenous communities entailed "recognition by exclusion".[193] These communities were seen through a "double bind" through a constitutive lack (of development), but also as "original and pristine"[194] carriers of a distinctive cultural heritage. This recognition of indigenous groups as culturally authentic, but constitutionally incapable of participating in decisions related to their political status, was intrinsic to nation-state formation. Categorised under 'Rhythm' in the portfolio, these images are rendered homogenous and blunt. These images project a façade of celebratory tribal groups, performing their diverse cultural identity, subserviently accepting the political unity of the nation-state.

Sadanandan notes the common motifs drawn up in the pictorial representations of the indigenous groups, such as the sensual, and gendered body of the indigenous woman, everyday representations of life through cultural festivals, dance, forest gatherings and their dwelling places. He points out that there are hardly any references to indigenous insurgencies or representations of them as warriors. Their life remains an "object of curiosity, a marker of an alternate culture, of the bourgeoise desire to know about the bodies of the other, and a nationalist metaphor of the representatives of India's pristine and

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[191] The only other women photographer to be included is British painter and photographer Stella Snead.

[192] Much has been written about Janah's connection with the *Communist Party of India* and his progressive photography of the Famine years (1943-45). Given his progressive leanings, his work has often been valued for offering an alternative optic. See, Janah, *Photographing India*; Roychoudhuri, 'Documentary Photography, Decolonization, and the Making of "Secular Icons"'. VK. Ramachandran, 'Documenting society and politics', *Frontline,* August 1998. However, within the grander expanse of the *Images of India* exhibition, these photographs co-produced the official state rhetoric and could be seen as a part of a broader interocular vision of indigenous groups that was being constructed in post-colonial India in the 1950s. For a critical review of Janah's photographs of tribes, Jhala, 'Tribals of India'. The optics of independent directors like Paul Zils also reflects an 'exotic' otherness for the tribes. Such visual imagination worked in tandem with post-colonial developmental ideology, projecting the state as forward-looking, while branding the indigenous citizens as stuck in time.

[193] Ghosh, 'Between Global Flows and Local Dams', 508.

[194] Svensson, *Production of Postcolonial India, and Pakistan: Meanings of Partition*, 118.

uncontaminated culture."[195] These representations acknowledged tribal culture by naturalising it, representation of tribals thus became an act by which nationalist intelligentsia acquired their cultural agency and legitimacy. While Sadanandan's observations are made in reference to modern art history writing, these observations are equally valid to the photographs of tribal people which situate their indigeneity in their cultural practices and everyday practices, suppressing any evidence of their political agency or the concreteness of their lived experience.

Prathama Banerjee writes:

> *Nationalism as a political paradigm, with its inherent historicism, ...develop (sic) a relationship of desire with the Adivasi, seeking to modernise, hinduise and nationalise the 'tribe' on the one hand, but on the other hand, to retain the so-called 'primordiality' that allowed reckless and intractable resistance to the universalising 'modern'.[196]*

On similar lines, Sutoris suggests that the lens of the state portrays these groups as frozen in time, individualised only by their visible attributes. He argues that this assumption of timeless eternity is indicative of a static-ness, an inability to change, that is constructed by depicting them as wearing traditional costumes from their past and performing ancient folk rituals, thus validating their diverse existence.[197] As Sadanandan points out, across the colonial and nationalist registers, tribals were portrayed as being primitive, body-centric, unthinking, extravagant and even violent.[198] While these tropes were used by the colonisers to dismiss the agency of tribal rebellions against the British, elite nationalist histories project the tribals through the lens of the 'primitive'.[199]

I want to build on his argument, by adding that this static-ness is prescribed to the indigenous communities not merely by the official narrative, or through cultural objects such as clothes or jewellery. The official vision effectively uses the aesthetic form of circularity to mark the indigenous communities as stuck in a timeless loop, from which only they can be 'saved' only by the paternal figure of the state. It is through the lyrical construction of static-ness prescribed by a circular movement, that the state establishes a dialectical image for itself as marching forward. All three photographs in Image 11 feed off this compositional circularity. Shobha Janah's photograph closely depicts a dancing couple

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[195] Sadanandan, 'What Was Modernism (in Indian Art)?', 64.

[196] Banerjee, 'Culture/Politics: The curious Double-bind of the Indian Adivasi', 126.

[197] Sutoris argues that the language of the documentaries was more conservative than Nehru's own views on indigenous tribes, suggesting the possibility of a 'middle layer' of government. Sutoris, 'Cinematic Imagining of the New Indian Citizen,' in *Visions of Development*, 99-130.

[198] Sadanandan, 'What Was Modernism (in Indian Art)?', 63.

[199] Indrakshi Tandon interrogates the power of the colonial and contemporary governments to categorise indigenous communities and the persistence of these categories over time, not just for the government but also for the indigenous groups themselves. Refer to Tandon, '*Othering* Adivasi Identities'.

in motion. Formal circularity is captured through the curvature of the woman's arms, her 'traditional' headband going in a circle around her head, and her skirt inscribed with multiple lines, all going around her body, giving the impression that she is dressed in multiple rings. The man's performing body is marked by a similar optics of curvature. His hands and feet are captured in motion, one above the other, the relational position of the limbs breaking the horizontal axis of the frame. This is further supplemented by the circularity of the drum that he carries in his neck. In the background, we see a group that is captured dancing along the perimeter of a semi-circular curve. The circular nature of folk choreography is evident in Sunil Janah's image on the right. The girls are photographed standing, presumably dancing in a circular form. The roundness of their bare shoulders and bent hips (possibly choreographed) complements the circularity of their headbands and thick round anklets. The curves in the composition of the frame become more evident when juxtaposed with the linear angularity seen in Images 6-10.

To give more examples, Ferriera's photograph at the bottom edge is a bird's eye view that fully captures the circular choreography of folk dances, that Shobha and Sunil Janah's photographs hint at. Image 12 is also another close-up photograph reflecting this circularity of form, emphasized through the girls' round necklaces and earrings. This formal circularity was a popular optic used to visualise the indigenous groups in that period (continuing up until contemporary times). By projecting the indigenous people as 'happily dancing and singing in groups', holding hands like children playing ring-of-roses, the optics of circularity, used thus, cages the indigenous groups in registers of infantility, naivety, timelessness, and changelessness. It is reflective of an imagination that sees the tribal groups as static, going round and round in circles, without moving forward, thus creating perfect contrasting optics for the paternal interventionist state that marches ahead. Indigenous groups represented an obstacle to progress in the colonial narrative.[200] This narrative continued in the postcolonial period as these 'primitive' indigenous groups were seen as a hindrance to modernist development.[201] Projecting them through optics of static circularity could be seen as one way for the paternalist state to claim unilateral decision-making power over land ownership patterns and exercise its authority on questions of sub-national identity. The optics of linear movement and static circularity are thus dialectically formed.

Garimella notes that "Mulk did not have a timeless or universalising narrative about folk and tribal craft and art". As an example, she notes Mulk's 1945 novel *The Big Heart* which provides a portrait of the coppersmith community in colonial Punjab to which Mulk himself belonged. While I agree with her

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[200] Skaria, 'Shades of Wildness Tribe, Caste, and Gender in Western India'; Skaria, 'Being Jangli'.

[201] Xaxa, *State, Society, and Tribes*; Sundar and Madan, *The Scheduled Tribes and Their India.*

claims that Mulk displayed an anti-feudal and at times anti-nostalgic stance in his early writings, I also want to note that the coppersmith community is a Hindu community that falls within the caste order. Scholarship that blankets lower caste communities and indigenous tribal groups together to refer to 'folk and tribal art" fails to notice the cultural specificities of indigenous groups versus the so-called lower caste Hindus. The economic conditions of these groups are indeed similar across many regions in India, yet the indigenous tribes in central India and north-eastern regions do not conform to either Hinduism or a similar definition of Caste. It is also critical to note that lower caste groups and indigenous tribal groups do not club themselves in the same category, although they have often come together to protest and agitate against Brahmanical and Fascist models of domination. I would therefore not consider Mulk's novel as a valid example to prove Mulk's non-universalising stance on tribes. While the photographs in the discussion here are taken by Sunil Janah, the publication of these images in *Marg* is supported by Mulk. Further research is required to explore Mulk's opinion on indigenous groups and the visual representations he supported. Since it is not in the scope of this dissertation, it will suffice to note that progressive left-leaning intellectuals and practitioners such as Sunil Janah and Mulk Raj Anand, have also replicated static representations of indigenous people, portraying these groups as complicit in state narratives on development. This was at a time when indigenous groups in the Northeast were involved in violent battles with the postcolonial state for their right to self-determination.[202]

Finally, while the collective spirit was evident in the language of the Planning Commission and other state policies of the time, the photographic representation of collectivisation as a state enterprise varies from the collectivisation of indigenous groups. As seen in Images 6-10, the collective spirit of the welfare state is shown through groups of working men involved in state-sponsored activities marching ahead, to fulfil a larger mission of building the nation. In contrast, the collective spirit of the indigenous groups is shown through a circular loop, implying an arrested movement that dialectically emboldens the forward march of the state. As Roy and Sutoris have both argued in their work on the Films Division's representations of indigenous people, marking these citizens as static enables the state to project a narrative of complicity. As history tells us, the narrative on the ground was far from complicit.

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[202] See, Garimella, *Mulk Raj Anand*, 26–27. My criticisms are not meant to dismiss the progressive work of these modernists but to highlight the complexities of ideological labelling and the contradictions that frame the relationship of histories of art to a divided and unequal postcolonial society up to this day.

Framing Social Accountability: Pushing for Welfare

A section of photographs conservatively titled *Family* deflects the traditional conception of the Hindu family rooted in the maintenance of caste purity. Simultaneously, they demystify the postcolonial conceptualisations of Unity in Diversity. Image 13 shows a family of musicians begging on the street. Taken from an eye-level perspective, this photograph depicts the man holding a musical instrument with his lips in motion, as if singing, pictured next to a woman sitting on the road and two children holding (begging) bowls.[203] It is paired with a verse by Rabindranath Tagore, "…some neighbour, a dweller in your own land, a brother almost has lost his way on this alien earth of my soul, where he wanders weeping*"*. The use of words like 'neighbour' and 'brother' can be read for its reference to universal humanist values and yet, unlike Steichen's brand of humanism, this message makes space for accountability. In the nation-state's welfarist ideology of the 1950s, this can be understood as pushing the state to take on a more paternal role. Simultaneously, the Gandhian notion of caste reform[204] allows us to understand this push for accountability as a push to the dominant groups in Hindu society to take responsibility and abandon the practice of untouchability. Whose brother and whose neighbour is weeping? Is it the responsibility of the dominant castes? Has their soul become 'alien' to the pain of their neighbour? This image, when viewed in conjunction with the text, offers a possibility of redirecting the universal humanistic photographic language to the welfarist expectation from the state and the need for caste reform within Hindu society.

Image 14 depicts a migrant family, possibly from a De-notified Tribe (DNT),[205] walking on the street. The man is clothed with a lower garment and carries a bamboo basket, utensils, and a bird, while a toddler sits on his shoulders. Next to him is a woman, presumably his wife, carrying some luggage on her head and a baby in her arms. The man's blurred hand suggests that the photograph was probably taken while in motion. Members of the DNT remain one of the most marginalised and excluded groups

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[203] In traditional Hindu society, occupations related to performing and theatre could be seen as restricted to certain oppressed caste groups.

[204] Gandhian ideas of caste reform envisaged *internal* accountability on the part of the dominant castes (Caste Hindus, as he called them) through abolishing untouchability practices in personal and public places. This involved organising inter-dining events when the dominant caste groups ate with the Dalits (Harijans, as he called them). Fundamental to this conception was Gandhi's idea that untouchability is an internal problem of Hinduism and can be resolved through a reformation of Caste Hindus.

[205] NT, or nomadic tribes are wandering indigenous groups that were criminalised by the colonial state for not being permanent settlers. In the postcolonial times, these tribes were de-notified from their criminal listings and referred to as De-notified tribes, DNT.

in Indian society. And the reasons for this exclusion can be traced to colonial law and Hindu Brahminical practices of Indian society which saw non-settler groups like the DNT as outcastes. At a time when the general thrust was to revive and reinvent pre-colonial tradition as a base for India's projected future, this photograph highlights exclusionary and discriminatory practices that were intrinsic to India's traditional past.

Image 13: I H Mahindra, 'untitled', photograph of a family on the streets, Plate 33, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

Image 14 : P Ramarao, 'untitled', photograph of a migrating family, Plate 34, Marg, December 1960, Mumbai.
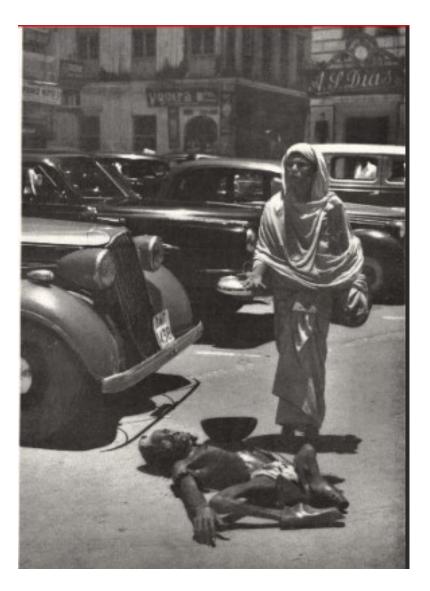
Image 15: R Bacha, 'untitled', photograph of a crippled man begging, Plate 42, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

Image 15 effectively locates *Pain* in the material dialectics of India's present. The image shows a crippled man accompanied by a woman begging on the road. Behind them are three expensive cars, illuminating the material contrast between the lives of the beggars and the car owners. Phillips notes a fascination for capturing the "social fantastic" through a juxtaposition of contrasts among American photographers of the 1950s and 1960s. Wandering photographers like Robert Frank and Garry Winogrand reconstructed the city as a "theatre of violent social contrast".[206] A similar attempt at capturing social contrasts is reflected in this image. The contradiction in this photograph is further highlighted by the accompanying text. It reads: "No food will reach the mouth unless the hands co-operate" hinting at a material divide, a fundamental contradiction at the crux of Indian society. As we

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[206] As noted in Phillips, 'Resurrecting Vision', 108.

already know, curator Chinwalla was keen on "not showing visually repulsive" content, unless a repulsive visual happens to be "an inextricable part of the whole structure".[207] Despite his intent to showcase the beauty of India, this image could be regarded as one of those instances that were an inextricable 'part of the whole structure', one that consolidated the need for a welfare state.
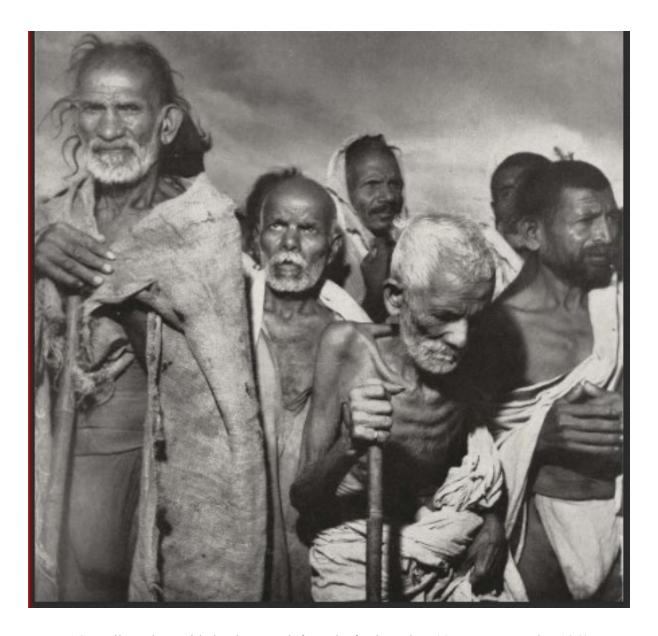
Image 16: Sunil Janah, 'untitled', photograph from the famine, Plate 44, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai

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[207] Chinwalla, 'Contemporary Trends'.

Image 16 is a famous photograph of famine in India (1943–45) by Janah depicting the frail bodies of old men, possibly waiting to get their share of rationed food.[208] The photograph, shot in black and white, possibly with a flash, foregrounds the old man in the centre of the frame. The focus is on his flailing body held steady with a stick and his bony rib cage devoid of any flesh. It is paired with a text that reads: "…In your prosperity, I also own a pice (sic)… Leaving me in poverty will also mean your adversity…". Together, the photograph and text, offer a view of a nation struggling with inequality by making the rich accountable for accumulating an unfair share of resources (similar to Image 15). The dramatic impulse of the photographic frame extends beyond its aesthetic function, raising questions Who is responsible for their famished state? Whose prosperity have they contributed to, at the cost of their lives?

The narrative of accountability seen in these sections can be understood in the context of Mulk's socialist egalitarian ideology and his support for the Nehruvian welfare state.[209] The general milieu in which *Marg* was published could also be considered a factor in shaping the tone of the portfolio images. For instance, in its Bombay editorial office, *Marg* shared space with another – now discontinued – monthly *Freedom First*, the editorial mandate of which was on the ideological lines of liberty, and social and economic justice for all. Within the progressive intellectual and artistic environment of the 1950-60s, social equality and economic justice were significant themes. The postcolonial state, as we will see in the next chapter, consolidated its authority as a welfarist paternal figure through developmental interventions meant to reorder inequalities in society. Simultaneously, the humanism of these images must also be acknowledged. Mulk, with his humanist leanings associated, his association with decolonial movements, his perception of the new state as a welfarist ally, and his desire to serve the nation-building project, simultaneously engender multiple possibilities to interpret the above images.

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[208] Janah's famine images from the 1940s were popular much before the *Images of India* exhibition. The inclusion of images from the colonial period, in this exhibition, could also be read as a possible comment on food scarcity in India post-independence, and the humiliating terms of grain import from the US.

[209] Garimella, *Mulk Raj Anand*, 22.

The Historical and Political Roots of the *Images of India*: Moving Beyond *The Family of Man*'s Universalism

As discussed earlier, Barthes argued that the *Family of Man* naturalised history, universalising social categories like Birth and Death. Taking his criticism as a starting point, I want to explore how the *Images of India* explores ideas like Birth and Death that often lend themselves to narratives of liberal universal humanism in the post-War period. Stimson Blake observes that *The Family of Man* created an image of the world that 'relieved the audience of the necessity to think politically'[210] by a denial of 'social' difference, thereby renouncing the discourse of power and responsibility "avoid[ing] the discourse of alliance and betrayal, which was likely to raise the threatening moral terms of complicity, blame and guilt". Its universal humanist ideals created by avoiding the historical frame meant that the exhibition inhibited the production of a political identity based on difference. The *Images of India* exhibition was visibly inspired by *The Family of Man* exhibition and attempted to utilise the language of photographic universalism, through its choice of images and display. Yet, the *Images of India* encoded these universalist ideas in historical nationalist optics, engaging with the politics of its time. For all its similarities with Steichen's show, the *Images of India* went further than its 'original' inspiration. I will elucidate this point by delving into the themes of *Death* and *New Beginning* as used in the *Images of India* exhibition portfolio.

Meenakshi Mukherjee writes about Mulk's quest for realism in his own literary work. His association with the Progressive Writers Movement, anti-colonial and socialist egalitarian ideology and belief in humanism and Gandhian values,[211] all influenced his literary works. Besides, Mulk and *Marg* reflected a strong desire to be of service to the nation-building project, which explains his support for the *Images of India* exhibition, its realistic themes and its portrayal of Indian (national) life. Yohannan writes, "Mediated through Western reports, India was long perceived as an exotic land; the native cultures and their live intelligence were not known to the world at large. There, Marg served a purpose. Its volumes consistently revealed the intricacies of cultural expression and featured the many evolved creative practices in different parts of India."[212]

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[210] Stimson, *The Pivot of the World, 80-97*.

[211] Rachel John, 'Mulk Raj Anand - the man who was mocked by an English critic,' *The Print*, September 28, 2019.

[212] Khorshed Deboo quoting Rizio Yohannan, CEO and publisher of Marg (2018-2021). See, Deboo, 'Revisiting the Past'.

Image 17: Sunil Janah, Henri Cartier-Bresson and Jitendra Arya, 'Death and New Beginning', magazine spread with three photographs, Plate 47 and 48, *Marg*, December 1960, Mumbai.

The two photographs under the section *Death* on the left side of Image 17 are now iconic images of Gandhi's funeral. The photograph on top is a close-up of his burning pyre by Janah. A similar photograph with an expansive background was carried by several newspapers too.[213] Against the dark background, the light of the fire stands out. The photograph at the bottom is a popular image captured by Henri Cartier-Bresson. It shows Gandhi's secretary, distraught, looking at the pyre, as his doctor waves his hands in the background to quieten the crowd.[214] These two photographs are accompanied

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[213] See, S Dutta, "67 years ago today, this is how the world's press mourned Gandhi's assassination," *Quartz India* dated January 31, 2015, accessed from https://qz.com/india/336644/67-years-ago-today-this-is-how-the-worlds-press-mourned-gandhis-assassination/; A Rajchowdhury, "When newspapers from across the world mourned the loss of Mahatma Gandhi," *The Daily Telegraph*, accessed from https://www.mkgandhi.org/last%20days/when-newspapers-across-the-world-mourned-the-loss-of-Mahatma-Gandhi.html#:~:text=%22The%20Daily%20Telegraph%22%2C%20gave,loss%20to%20India%20and%20world%22

[214] This photograph is widely available on the internet, along with more pictures of Gandhi's funeral procession. This description of the photograph is taken from Peter Fetterman's collection accessed from

by Nehru's famous words aired after Gandhi's death, "the light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere…".

Gandhi received a public funeral in Delhi after he was assassinated on January 31st, 1948, by Hindu fanatic Nathuram Godse. This funeral was followed by a fortnight-long official mourning period and then the immersion of his ashes in Allahabad, in a widely participated event. Gandhi's death has been perceived as a "turning point in the communal relations after the partition", suggesting a "triumph of secularism over communalism". Yasmin Khan argues that Gandhi's death was *not* a "natural" turning point, rather it unfolded within "a particular cultural field, from which actors draw meaning".[215] It is an event of historical significance, not just because of Gandhi's popularity, but also because of its impact on the post-independence politics of that period.

Gandhi's funeral was an extensively photographed event. Besides images by Henri Cartier-Bresson and other international photographers present, the event was also aerially photographed and projected directly into people's homes, a technological feat with the latest technology such as the mobile transmitter van.[216] The photograph at the bottom of the left page in Image 17 is accredited to Magnum photographer Henri Cartier Bresson, in the year 1948.[217]

The funeral, a spectacle in itself, was centred in Delhi but was oriented toward the international gaze. "Gandhi's greatness and by extension, the greatness of India itself, was making headline news from Washington DC to Beijing."[218] In a description of the funeral scene, Khan writes that the space was

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https://www.artsy.net/artwork/henri-cartier-bresson-gandhis-secretary-watches-the-first-flames-of-the-funeral-pyre-delhi-india.

[215] Khan, 'Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State', 58-61.

[216] Ibid., 66.

[217] For a generation of Indian photographers inspired to take up the documentary medium, Bresson's work popularised the notion that the best photographs are made by a patient photographer who is a witness ready to capture the fleeting moment with just one click of the shutter. His name features repeatedly in the discussions on documentary photography in the back issues of *Click* magazine and Marg December 1960 issue on photography. Nadya Bair challenges the individual-centred discourse on Cartier-Bresson's work and the Decisive Moment paradigm. Bair, 'The Decisive Network'. Also see, James, 'Henri Cartier-Bresson's "Man and Machine"'.

[218] Khan, 'Performing Peace',68.

cleared up for the pyre at Raj Ghat in Delhi so that the dignitaries, both national and international, could assemble in close proximity. His son Ramdas Gandhi lit the pyre and the attending priest, recited Vedic texts. The photograph of the burning pyre at the top seems to reflect this moment, while Bresson's photograph at the bottom shows the uneasy crowds as they surged "dangerously close to the pyre".[219] Khan mentions Nehru's efforts in urging people to go back while leading cabinet members picked up small children. There is also a mention of barbed wire, use of mounted troopers and lancers, and even a lathi-charge (use of police baton) to physically press back the people (who had come to see Gandhi's last rites).[220] This is the precise moment that Bresson's photograph seems to capture, with the doctor's figure in the background waving to the crowd to step away.

Gandhi's funeral was followed by a fortnight of mourning and immersion of Gandhi's ashes, a public trial of Nathuram Godse at the Red Fort and a ban on the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) and other religious nationalist organisations.[221] As the metaphors of the nation being rendered fatherless were broadcast, the metaphor of Gandhi as the Father figure (and co-parent to Mother India) to a newly independent nation spread in the following two weeks.[222] Gandhi's death and the subsequent rituals, including the funeral, assumed critical historical significance in the public consciousness. These two photographs, shown under the theme of Death in the *Images of India* exhibition, can be viewed as a part of the larger cultural and symbolic web of collective responsibility, secularism and state sovereignty reiterated in the public discourse through this death. Gandhi's *Death* was a historical death and there were efforts to construct it as a political death. Besides the state's efforts, several civil society groups who aligned with Gandhi's ideals constructed this Death as the political beginning of a new ideology. Khan writes about the collective nature of the mourning by referring to the pledges that were solemnly sworn on the day of the funeral in collective meetings across the country.[223]

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[219] Ibid.

[220] On the idea of crowds and discipline in Indian political consciousness, see Chakrabarty, 'In the Name of Politics'.

[221] On Gandhi's assassin Godse's involvement with the RSS, a cultural organisation centred on the idea of political Hindutva, See, Mukherjee, Mukherjee, and Mahajan, *RSS, School Texts and the Murder of Mahatma Gandhi*. In the aftermath of the assassination, the state started a crackdown on RSS workers, banning the RSS and other religious nationalist organisations on 4th February, 1948. On the impact of Gandhi's death among Muslims, see Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, 145.

[222] Khan, 'Performing Peace: Gandhi's Assassination as a Critical Moment in the Consolidation of the Nehruvian State', 71.

[223] Ibid., 74.

One such pledge printed in a pamphlet that circulated after the assassination reads:

> *I, rudely shaken to my very foundations by the sudden and unexpected demise of Bapuji, the Father of Our Nation, hereby pledge that I shall do everything possible, by action and thought, to see his cause succeed. I will see a) That communalism is eradicated from every walk of our life | b) That untouchability is liquidated once and for all, and c) That Social and Economic Democracy is brought into reality, that being the latest mission which Gandhiji laid down in the Harijan. I am affixing my signature to this pledge, after full realisation of the difficulties involved as also the significance of this mission. Babuji Zindabad, Jai Hind.[224]*

I want to draw attention here to the collective responsibility placed on the mourners to complete Gandhi's mission, worded in the document as eradication of communalism and liquidation of untouchability. G Pandey urges us to look at the death of Gandhi as a trigger for change.[225] This hope for change through Gandhi's historical death is carried forward through the next and final image, titled *New Beginning*.

Photographed by Jitendra Arya, this full-page photograph shows a pregnant sweeper woman (Image 17). In his own writing, Arya states, "I was struck by this pregnant sweeper woman who stood there with regal dignity and in a manner which would make many a fashion model envious".[226] Using Pinney's methodological suggestion that "images can be disassembled, and its signs checked off against their presumed referents",[227] one can unravel several signs within this photograph: pregnancy suggests the promise of a new arrival while seeing the sweeper woman as regal and dignified signifies the Gandhian rhetoric of untouchables as *Harijan*, or *Children of God*, who work 'selflessly' for the society.[228]

Photographer Jitendra Arya was born in Nairobi, Kenya, to parents of Indian origin. He lived and worked in London till the mid-1970s and was well known for his photographs of Nehru, and his family, and famous Bollywood actors, among other well-known personalities. Curator Sabeena Gadihoke did

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[224] This text is published by N N Agarwala, India's Saviour Crucified: a challenge for us to think and act, unpaginated, Agra: Shiva Publication, 1948. Reproduced in Khan, 'Performing Peace', 74.

[225] Pandey, *Remembering Partition*, 145.

[226] Arya, *Marg*, Volume XIV, Number 1 (December 1960):55.

[227] Pinney, '"A Secret of Their Own Country": Or, How Indian Nationalism Made Itself Irrefutable', 134.

[228] Gandhi and Ambedkar's views on caste frequently clashed. I want to point out that, unlike Ambedkar who saw caste as a system of graded (in)equality intrinsic to Hindu society, Gandhi saw problems in practices arising from it such as untouchability and exclusion. In 1956, Ambedkar publicly converted *out* of Hinduism.

a retrospective show on his work in 2018, referring to him as the master of staged as well as candid portraiture.[229] Interestingly, Gadihoke mentions his skills in *staged* portraiture, as this photograph from the *Images of India* portfolio reflects some of Arya's own 'edits' made after the photograph was taken. To highlight the subject in the foreground, he writes, "I have darkened the reclining poles and a tin container near the foreground which happened to be in the picture as the time".[230] Arya was known to have "authored stardom" for many Bollywood celebrities through his photographs. Given this background, the use of this photograph can be seen for its attempt to create a 'larger than life' presence for those 'on the margins' in post-independent India. Thus, hinting at the utopian aspirations of the 1950s espoused by RJ Chinwalla and Mulk Raj Anand. This hope that emerges from the portfolio's last photograph can be seen for its association with the aspiration of modernist photography to 'move' and alter the optics. At the same time, the enchantment with the figure of the sweeper woman and projecting her as the new star against a darkened background can be read as *Images of India*'s pictorial heritage, thus occupying the transition space between Pictorialism and modernist photography in the period.

Meenakshi Mukherjee points out Mulk's inclination to see endings as new beginnings in his novels. Endings, in his work, suggest a plan for future action.[231] This approach is visible in the way the themes in the portfolio are structured, ending the story of *Images of India* with Death and New Beginning, as we discussed. The historical and ideological Death of Gandhi is seen as connected to a new beginning of hope and change through the implementation of Gandhi's ideas on Dalit upliftment. It is perhaps useful to connect this Gandhian imagination of a new beginning to Mulk's association with the Gandhian movement and his time at the Sabarmati Ashram in Ahmedabad in the 1930s when he was writing the first draft of his acclaimed novel 'Untouchable'.

From our discussion on three photographs in Image 17, Death and New Beginning have been depicted through specific historical incidents and ideological currents that were foundational to the postcolonial Indian nation. The curator (and editor) attempted to structure a political identity for the nation through the choice of images and their crafted sequencing. Instead of focussing on the universalistic essence of the process of death and pregnancy, the historical modes of Death and New Beginning were amplified to raise pertinent political questions– why was Gandhi killed? What ideology was responsible for this

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[229] Reference in Tripathi, Shailaja. 'The light of way,' *The Hindu*, July 26, 2018. Accessed February 22, 2021 A retrospective of Jitendra Arya's works shows the evolution of glamour photography in India - The Hindu .

[230] Arya, *Marg*, 55.

[231] Mukherjee, 'The Tractor and the Plough', 96–98.

death? What is the status of the sweeper woman in India in the 1960s? Given the poor standards of living for most marginalised communities in India, what were the mortality rates of infants born in these communities? What future does postcolonial India offer to them? Geeta Kapur writes that the way to resist for Mulk Raj Anand was to "always *historicize"* locating his position as a philosophical writer from India, critiquing the euro-centric bias in enlightenment values.[232] It is this deliberate use of historical, ideological, and postcolonial nationalist optics in the *Images of India* exhibition and the portfolio, which make it a concrete response to its time, moving beyond its original inspiration, *The Family of Man.*

In conclusion, the *Images of India* was a response triggered by *The Family of Man* in India. As much as *The Family of Man* inspired Chinwalla, Unwalla and Mulk, the *Images of India* exhibition was anchored within an alternative optical expanse of the postcolonial nation and was testimony to an evolving relationship between photographic technology and the new nation. Its origins can be loosely traced to the scholarly collectivised space generated by clubs like the PSI which saw the creativity of the photographer in their ability to resist a subservience to the grandiosity of the camera, while simultaneously utilising its mechanical existence to further a creative vision. The creative pleasure was defined through the integration of mechanical and imaginative labour, with its roots stretching between the Pictorialists, Modernists, their exchanges, and overlaps. In the words of Thomas, the field of documentary photography in India growing due to the "trigger happy paterfamilias" who click for the "pleasure" of it and those who assiduously are keeping a track of the progress of the country since its birth "as a nation" relying on photography for permanent "optical evidence"[233]. In the practice of the scholarly discussions at the PSI, these were not exclusive categories. Nor was universal humanism an exclusive category, as decolonial artists-intellectuals across the world articulated humanism as an inclusive category. The exhibition that emerged was a mix of many impulses and shared inter-ocular overlaps across national, transnational, and local registers. It historicizes naturalised categories of human existence, rearticulated humanism in a transnational decolonial frame and mapped a political allegory for the new nation. In doing so, it surpassed its original inspiration, *The Family of Man* exhibition.

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[232] See Geeta Kapur's essay on Partisan Modernity in Garimella, '*Mulk Raj Anand'*, 30.

[233] G Thomas, *Contemporary Indian Photography*, 4.

2. Fragmented Optics of Development: Investigating Photography in Village Reconstruction Programs
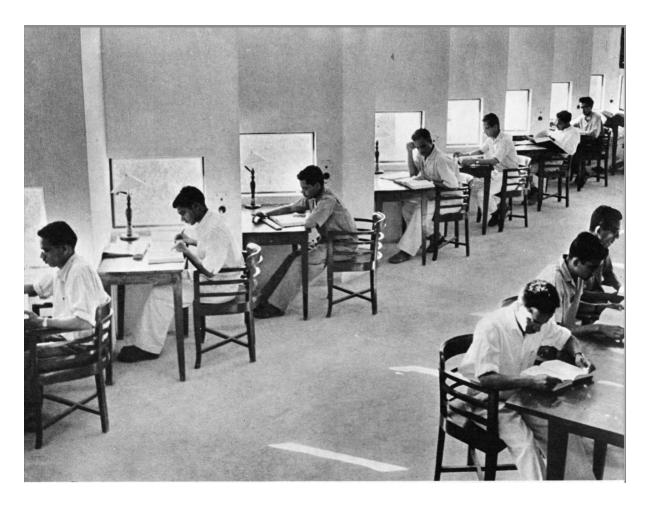
Image 18: Boucas, 'Engineers in The New India', photograph, *The Courier*, UNESCO, May 1955.

In May 1955, UNESCO's magazine carried a photo essay titled "Engineers in the New India" (Image 18). The essay talks about the construction of a technological institute in Bombay with the Soviet Union and UNESCO assistance. One striking photograph in this essay is an image showing the interior of a library where several men, presumably engineering students, sit on chairs, deeply focussed on their object of study in the light of a lampshade. The image displays a peculiar modernist aesthetic, where each engineer is serially seated and the light from the window reflects the sharp vertical edges of the separating cubicles. The students are seated in a row that cuts diagonally through the frame. Each one has access to a rectangular table and a squarish window, with the frame highlighting the symmetry of the geometrical lines. The students look like replicas of one other, each deeply engrossed in their study, as if instructed to not look up by the photographer. The sharp lines in the image – diagonal and vertical,

the symmetry of the geometrical shapes, and the photographer's intention to capture seriality through repetition of the figure reflect a modernist aesthetic built on technocratic aspirations.

The postcolonial nation-state had an increasing preference for this aesthetic as it ushered out its five-yearly plans in a developmental modernist framework. My use of the terms 'modern' and 'modernist' here, does not indicate a particular period. Instead, it is informed by Rebecca Brown's use of the term in its epistemological usage within the broader discourse of progress, future-oriented universalist visions, the primacy of the subject and a turn away from religion towards reason.[234] The modernist aesthetic I refer to is seen in the preference for linearity and orderly progression, often depicted through aesthetic strategies like serialisation and repetition of form as well as an inclination for sharp lines, intuitively linking formal geometry and grid structures to the larger discourse of order and homogeneity in developmental modernity. Christopher Phillips has noted the revolutionising impact of photography on the visual language of the 1920-30s, through the modernist experimental works of Lazlo Moholy Nagy, El Lisitsky and Alexander Rodchenko.[235] Steve Edwards has elaborated on the use of photography to alter perception, often implemented by using the camera to construct alternative viewpoints such as the bird's view or worm's view seen in the work of Soviet constructionists like Rodchenko. By consciously using different viewpoints and extreme angles of vision to alter the perception of reality, modern photography attached specific values to specific lines of sight.[236] Highlighting the formal aspects such as geometry, symmetry, angles, and light, allowed the mechanical form of the camera to reveal itself, and even amplify itself.

The new state with its aspirations for linearity and order pushed for a visual alteration of the existing landscapes into orderly, systematized, and efficient ways of living. One recurring sore in this linear trajectory was the village unit, which became the focus of reconstruction projects in the 1950s. The underlying reformist attitude of such projects had a markedly visual character as a network of state and non-state actors, international aid agencies and independent activist reformers brought their resources to change how the village looked and remodel it under the modernising aesthetic of the developmental nation-state. Each of these agencies had its interests and stakes and functioned through non-homogeneous and often conflicted layers of hierarchy. This chapter is positioned within the broader debates surrounding developmental modernism and the transnational flow of 'aid' during the Cold War

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[234] Brown, *Art for a Modern India, 1947-1980*, 4.

[235] Phillips, 'Resurrecting Vision'.

[236] Edwards, 'Photography and Photomontage in the USSR and Germany'.

as well as in the aftermath of the 1947 India partition and the emerging postcolonial nationalism. The primary material here is an album from the National Archives of India: *Album 86 - Engineer's problems in Ganga Khadar,* produced by the engineers employed by the Public Works Department (PWD), working on a rural reconstruction program (late 1940s-early 1950s) in the state of Uttar Pradesh. While the engineers view the village as a site of reconstruction, these visions of reconstruction self-reflexively reveal the engineer's (and state's) eye and its gaps/blind spots, brought into the spotlight through the (statist) eye's contact with the local and specific. Nicholas Smith has pointed out that Scott's classic *Seeing like A State*, which is foundational to my research questions, does not address the nature of individual state actors and their way of seeing.[237] In his recent essay, Scott has acknowledged that state vision is often contradictory, wrecked by intra-administrational struggles leading to fissures in state-vision and its incoherence on ground.[238] This chapter addresses this gap, by focusing on the PWD engineers – as the state agents involved in the act of seeing and showing.

Besides the modernist aesthetics of the image, its formal geometry and penchant for angular vision, what were the other sites of modernity constructed through photography? This is a question central to my dissertation and will be explored at length in this chapter. How did photographic practices beyond 'taking the photograph' - such as collecting, documenting, and compiling photographs into an album form - factor in the construction of postcolonial modernity?

I am drawing on Elizabeth Edwards' writing on photographic collecting practices associated with colonial governance in London between the late 1860s and 1875. In her essay 'Photographic Uncertainties: Between Evidence and Reassurance', Edwards argues that despite the assumption of photography as a mechanically objective device capable of making truth claims, photographic 'evidence' was far from certain. Exploring the unsystematic nature of photographic collecting practices in the Colonial Office, her work shows the heterogeneity of photographic utility in colonial power relations.[239] Her work is important to our discussion as it brings up two themes that will be discussed in the course of this chapter. First, what is the work that photographs are expected to do within state projects? And second is the question of the "negative imprint of the archive"[240]- what is the relationship of photographic evidence to absences in the state archive?

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[237] Smith, 'Seen Like a State'.

[238] Scott, 'Further Reflections on Seeing Like a State'.

[239] Edwards, 'Photographic Uncertainties'.

[240] Ibid, 172.

Over the course of this chapter, I will complicate the uncertain relationship between photography and evidence, demonstrating that the photographs used in the official album discussed here, do not show what they intend to show. The work they do is not informed by the image captured by the photographer. Instead, as a part of a photographic collection in an official album that is now a part of the central government archive, the value of the photographs is defined by the nature of the album as a collection of images and as an object that is to be gifted/passed on. Towards, the end of the chapter, the final section on the fragmented nature of postcolonial optics, delves into the question of absences. If the photographic album discussed here is taken as a micro-official archive, what happens to realities that are left out of this archive? In my attempt to excavate the silences caused by the absence of photographs, I will attempt to read the album for what is missing, using conjectures, questions and doubts to present a counter archive – one that is cognisant of the absences and that intends to retrieve the political agency of those silenced by the tyranny of state photographic practices and archival collections.

Building on the subaltern lens drawn up in the Introduction and the discussion on the nation's relationship to indigenous groups in the first chapter, I intend to situate my discussion on the village as a caste-divided site. Santosh Sadanandan notes that the canonical history of modernism in/through art is a "history of vertical appropriations and the institutionalised character of hierarchisation."[241] This mode of art history writing appropriates the subaltern as subjects *of* nationalist modernity, dismisses their claims to development or modernity and erases the elite's own histories of exploitation and cultural appropriation under the label of nationalism, "thus reinforcing their own sense of self and glorifying their own cultural violence."[242] In a bid to write a history of photography outside these canons, I am choosing to discuss an album that is almost an aberration to the usual photographs of state rural development projects in that period. The usual theme of photographs in state collections shows groups of villagers complicit in state developmental activities - through group meetings, villagers involved in discussions, using new infrastructure created by the state, expressing happiness and gratitude for the activities of the welfare state in transforming their lives. However, this particular is an aberration to the propagandist discourse. As we will see in the context of this chapter, Album 86 discusses rural development from the perspective of the engineers deemed as experts engineers reform in these villages. Instead of projecting the villagers as happy citizens and complicit subjects in the welfare state's developmental vision, this photographic album reveals the internal dissonances in the state's vision of development.

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[241] Santhosh, 'What Was Modernism (in Indian Art)?', 59.

[242] Ibid.

Photography and the Making of the State

In the Introduction, I discussed Scott's writing which explores the role of the visual in constructing legitimacy for the state, constructing the presence of the state in spaces which earlier did not recognise the authority of the state.[243] In the aftermath of the 1857 War of Independence, the British employed photography to gather the information that enabled them to 'know' its colonial subjects as a way of consolidating British presence and preventing future challenges to its authority.[244] One of the most (in)famous examples of this is *The People of India* series (1868-1875). As a collection of four hundred and eighty albumen prints of people from different communities and caste groups, this eight-volume series by Watson J Forbes (1827-1892) and John William Kaye (1814-1876), commissioned by the colonial administration, produced a mix of photographs and texts to categorise and define the colonial subjects for governance.[245] It reveals the significance of collecting and categorising for archival use, as an essential knowledge-production strategy for the colonial rulers.[246] Laura Jenkins compared *The People of India* series with a postcolonial 'nationalist' attempt to document the people of India, to suggest that the postcolonial state builds on the legacies of colonial anthropology.[247]

According to Scott, the high modernism of institutional state practices functions with a 'logic of improvement' funnelled by a powerful aesthetic dimension. State-led social engineering percolated on the ground through layered systems of bureaucratic management (and often 'mismanagement'). While

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[243] Scott further details the production of state spaces and non-state spaces as a method of governance. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 183–87.

[244] Shakunthala Rao has studied Samuel Bourne's photographs and their social and political implications, to explain how photography aided the establishment of the British Raj. See, Rao, 'Imperial Imaginary: Photography and the Invention of the British Raj in India'. Malvika Karlekar also notes that photography supported the construction of an imperial gaze by becoming a part of the surveillance structures of the colonial government. See, Karlekar, *Visual Histories*.

[245] Paddaya mentions the Oriental Races and Tribes by Johnson in 1963 as another reference to the use of photography in colonial state-making. Paddayya, 'On the Earliest Use of Photography as a Documentation Procedure in Indian Ethnology'.

[246] Dilpreet Bhullar offers a gendered lens to study *The People of India* series. See, Bhullar, *Configuring Difference and Reconfiguring Recognition*. Jessica Farquhar has examined the broader circulation of images from the series within the broader British public sphere, to explore the consolidation of colonial knowledge beyond the series. See, Farquhar, *Beyond Binding*.

[247] Jenkins, 'Another "People of India" Project: colonial and national anthropology'.

the transformation of physical realities remained the defined goal of several developmental schemes of the period, it was not the only agenda. As Scott reminds us, modernism sought a cultural revolution through the creation of a new person.[248] Several ex-colonial countries made it their mission to recast this rhetoric within nationalist frames and launched full-scale developmental operations,[249] one among them was India. By the 1950s, as an international discourse on development emerged, Nehru's vision for India was a part of this internationalist frame.[250] Nehruvian ideas of linear progression, in coordination with postcolonial trajectories across the world, were about moving towards the future, the 'new'. These ideals are echoed in his words when at the launch of the Community Development Program (CDP) in 1952, he envisaged development as a strategy "to raise the general level of the average man of the country",[251] aligning with an international zeal for reform and reconstruction across newly independent countries. This developmental enterprise failed in India due to the postcolonial nation-state's inability to recognise its inherent contradictions which made the internationalist universal 'man', a hierarchical being in Indian society, one whose existence was graded according to locally anchored divisions.[252]

Fredric Cooper traces the origin of post-war developmental projects as a strategy of the colonial powers to continue influencing the ex-colonies in the post-war years.[253] In many ways, development was a continuation of colonialism. Building on Cooper and Packard's work, Hodge argues that development was a "framing device" bringing together a range of interventionist policies with the goal of "raising" the people's standard of living to manage the crisis of the late colonial world.[254] This effort to change the people's way of living was led by an army of experts which included social scientists, anthropologists, economists, population studies researchers, engineers and more. Timothy Mitchell's scholarship on expert-led reform encourages us to examine the question of human agency within the

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[248] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 195.

[249] C.f. Engerman, 'Development Politics and the Cold War'; Martins, *Photography and Documentary Film in the Making of Modern Brazil*; Also see, Sackley, 'Village Models'.

[250] Sunil Khilnani writes, "with old barriers breaking down and life [becoming] more international", Nehru believed that India needed to become more international. Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, 416. Benjamin Zachariah has also written about the association of postcolonial development with Nehruvian ideas. See, Zachariah, *Nehru*.

[251] Nehru quoted in *Kurukshetra*, April 1954, 8.

[252] Several other intersectional ties were subsumed under the universal understanding of 'man' - gender, and class to name two significant absences. Yet here, I am choosing to draw only on caste as an analytic tool to study the divisions underplaying the Indian village.

[253] Stoler and Cooper, 'Between Metropole and Colony,' 64. Also, Cooper, 'Modernizing Bureaucrats, Backward Africans and the Development Concept'.

[254] Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, 3.

reform and improvement discourse in mid-twentieth century development theories. He defines experts as those social actors who have the ability to calculate, differentiating them from other social actors who are not thought to have the ability to reckon or gauge conditions, such as the peasants or the rural poor.[255] This divide, he argues, marks the basis of technological development programs across the world in the 1950s and becomes the justification for the politics of social improvement and frames the need for the expert figure.

Scott suggests that the "(developmental) imagination has a pictorial quality",[256] because any substantial state intervention in society requires visible units which could be observed, recorded, counted, aggregated, and monitored. Quoting Proudhon, Scott reminds us that to be ruled, is to be kept an 'eye' on, inspected, spied on, regulated, and ordered about, to be noted, registered, reformed, redressed and corrected.[257] Development, as the imagination of an aspirational future, was intricately linked to photography's presence within the postcolonial nation-state. The developmental optics of the postcolonial state offered a "technical imagination of what might be possible" and this imagination had a definite "pictorial quality"[258]. The photographic eye was associated with the very conception of developmental modernity, allowing us to think of photography not just as a tool to represent development or the lack of it, but as a performative marker essential to construct the category of development and modernity itself. The reconstruction plans operated not just with a bureaucratic logic, but also an aesthetic logic determining how modern Indian villages should 'look'. The underlying logic was that if it looks right, it will function well. As problems came to be optically defined in terms of how India should not 'look', solutions also privileged the adoption of, to borrow Scott's phrase, "static freeze frame answers". This logic ensured that photography, with its ability to make 'moving' realities into 'static' frames, had a vital currency and therefore became a much-used and often misused tool. As we will discuss in this chapter, the conceptualisation of what is developed and what is not was characterised by appearances, entangling photographic optics within the emerging developmental-modernist framework of the 1950s. The failure of these reconstruction projects attempting to alter the 'look', was thereby, inevitably an optical failure. Nation-state, I argue, failed to see the village as a divisive site riddled with contradictions, resulting in a mis-perception of the 'problems' of the villagers and an

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[255] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 2002, 10.

[256] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 227.

[257] I want to note the Foucauldian inspirations in Scott's work. While the former discusses the panoptic vision as a strategy of control, the latter brings the Foucauldian analysis to understand the developmental state.

[258] This discussion is built on Scott's writing. Ibid., 227–37. This quote is from Scott referring to Bienhart.

eventual fiasco in terms of the developmental solutions it offered and the modernity it hoped to usher in.

Building on Scott and Mitchell's work, this chapter discusses Album 86 as a photographic record of one instance of expert-led (mis)management that occurred while remaking the village and the villager under the developmental vision of New India. Scott's work, Foucauldian in approach, offers the foundation for analysing this album. As we move forward in our analysis, Subir Sinha and Prakash Kumar's approaches will be useful in drawing up the critiques of a top-down view of development, drawing on an understanding seen from the bottom-up.[259] Finally, we will use G. Aloysius and Bhimrao Ambedkar's critiques to explore the optical failures of the postcolonial nation-state. In the process, this chapter shall locate the photographic album as a common practice in the bureaucratic–expert channels of the 1950s. What was the visual dimension of the village development plans? How was this reconstructed village aesthetic codified? The experts went to the villages as outsiders with little experience of rural living armed with the authority to usher in changes. What was the perceptual politics at play in this process of expert-led reform from the outside? What were the contradictions, gaps, and failures in the optics of state-led developmental modernism?

Seeing Like a State: Perceptual Politics of Development

Probably in the early 1950s, Album 86 (See Image 19) undersigned by the chief engineer M G Bhargava was presented to Nehru. The title of the album suggests that it was an attempt by the PWD engineers to bring to Nehru's notice, the challenging conditions of their work and their persistence despite the 'problems'. It focuses on reconstruction work in the Ganga Khadar region in the Hastinapur block of Meerut District in Uttar Pradesh (henceforth, UP). The album is a twenty-five-page handmade book with thirty-nine pasted photographs and typed text alongside most photographs.

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[259] Sinha, 'Lineages of the Developmentalist State'; Kumar, 'A Big Machine Not Working Properly.'
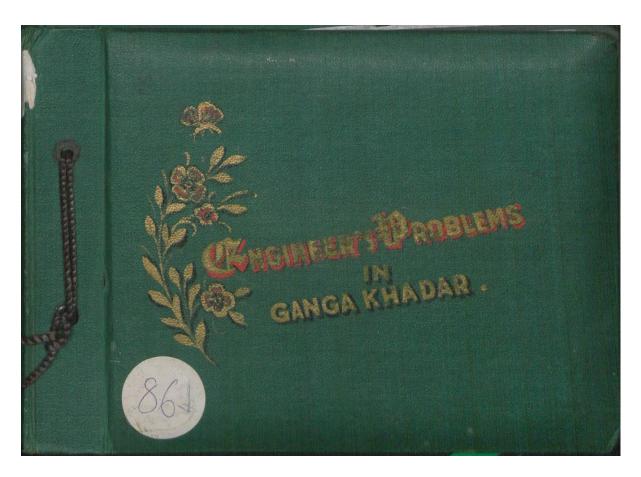
Image 19: PWD, 'Engineer's Problems in Ganga Khadar', Album cover, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

It is difficult to date the album since no other information is available on the physical copy or in the National Archive of India (NAI) catalogue. However, we do know that a massive rehabilitation program for partition refugees was launched on 6th February 1949 with the re-establishment of Hastinapur town. The map on the first page of the album depicts the Hastinapur block possibly hinting that this album could be linked to the same program. Accordingly, the album could be roughly dated to the early 1950s, a few years after the inauguration in 1949. Tan Tai Yong and Gyanesh Kudaisya suggest a possible link between post-partition rehabilitation and the reshaping of rural east Punjab,[260] as the event of partition set in motion a chain of events leading up to the Green Revolution of the late 1960s and 1970s. However, not just east Punjab, but several regions in North India felt the impact of partition as the incoming refugees were rehabilitated across UP, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Delhi.[261] The re-establishment of the Hastinapur town was one such example of rehabilitation attempts for the partition refugees. At the inauguration of Hastinapur, Nehru is reported to have linked the reestablishment of Hastinapur in 1949

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[260] Kudaisya and Yong, *The Aftermath of Partition in South Asia*.

[261] While several other regions in the west, east and southern India accommodated incoming refugees, for our discussion, I limit my focus to the north, which accommodated maximum numbers.

to the Hastinapur city from the epic Mahabharata, establishing a connection between modern nation building with a mythical past,[262] reiterating the postcolonial state's attempt to create a futuristic aspiration through a re-imagination of the past. As a part of his speech, Nehru also urged the people to work towards increasing self-sufficiency by increasing food production on one hand and consuming only as much as they produce. This remark is also reflective of the dire food crisis of 1949-51 when India relied on other countries for good-grain imports.[263] The years after Independence also saw several policy changes affecting the social and political structure of UP. Prominent among these were the passage of the UP-Panchayat Raj Act Number 26 in 1947, which allowed each village with a population of fifteen hundred to constitute a self-governing assembly called Gaon Sabha, and the Zamindari Abolition Act of 1950,[264] which altered the rural economic and social structure.

Photographs are both images as well as physical objects[265] with a social and cultural frame of their own. Thinking materially about photography involves examining the intention of the makers, the processes of production, distribution, consumption, use and discarding of photographs.[266] As Elizabeth Edwards reminds us, photographs intrinsically link "meaning as images and meaning as objects, an indissoluble, yet ambiguous melding of image and form, both of which are direct products of intention". The material form exists in correlation with the image itself to create 'an associative value' for the photographs in the album, impacting how the photographs are 'read', signalling, and determining expectations and use patterns of the photographs.[267] We are aware that the PWD staff were bringing together these photographs for a very specific purpose – of gifting it to Nehru. The photographs we discuss here are not merely descriptive in their function. As a part of an album, these photographs are arranged with a specific purpose and project a specific visuality which enables the album to be valued as an object. This

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[262]Nehru, *Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru Series Nine*, 42.

[263] Partition also saw communal tensions in UP and several food shortages leading the then Chief Minister of the region, G B Pant to call for grain imports. Pant and Nehru both blamed the situation of rural UP on the authoritarian administrative system of the British, which was deemed insensitive to local interests. Sackley, 'Village Models', 755.

[264] The Zamindar Abolition Act limited the amount of land under private ownership and was hailed as a landmark policy promising land inequity in India. However, its implementation was left wanting as several zamindars (owners with huge amounts of land) disguised as big cultivators, traders and money lenders had the power to eject small landholders from their land, leading to continuing the debt culture of rural households. For more, Dhagamwar, 'Problems of Implementing Agrarian Legislation in India'; Thimmaiah, *New Perspectives on Land Reforms in India*.

[265] Batchen, *Photography's Objects*, 2.

[266] Attfield, *Wild Things*, 3.

[267] Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 2.

album, given to Nehru is not just a setting for displaying the engineer's developmental work in the Ganga Khadar area, but a part of the process of bringing development to the village.

The gift is a social actor, as its existence produces effects in the field of social action, in a way that would not have been produced without it.[268] The album is thus, as Elizabeth Edwards suggests, "actively enmeshed in social relations" between several layers of bureaucracy - from the staff working in the village, to engineers who facilitated the production of these photographs, to those who chose the photographs. Also, this chain includes Mr Bhargava and others who may have edited the album up to Nehru and his secretaries, who may have received the album as a gift, the staff at the archives who catalogued and stored it, and researchers like me who may have viewed it. Several levels of social relations are thus, factored into one album. Histories of change in ownership and physical location suggest a complex and changing pattern of values and relationships ascribed to the photographs inside the album.[269] While this album led a primarily institutional life for several decades with its once active signifiers now dormant, the traces of its former lives cling to it, revealing vital clues into the historical potency of the photographs in this album.

This is also a good time to point out that such albums were fairly common as seen from the extensive collection of similar albums gifted to Nehru by different government departments which are now in the possession of NMML or NAI. These include albums gifted to Nehru after his visits to other nations, or different states in India. There are several albums given by the specific departments that hosted him on official visits, often thanking him for visiting and using the album as an opportunity to show their work, sometimes subtly making a demand for extra funds. Some albums were also gifted by individual people, often on behalf of organisations or societies they represented. Marcel Mauss studied gift-giving practices in Polynesia, Melanesia, and the Pacific Northwest, arguing that gift exchange in archaic societies was based on reciprocal benefits. Despite its appearance of voluntariness, most gifts were given and received obligatorily.[270] His theory has been challenged[271] and reworked multiple times and I am building my understanding here from O'Neill's work that defends Mauss' theory against Derrida's

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[268] For an anthropological understanding of art and its social presence, see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency.*

[269] Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 4.

[270] Mauss, '*The Gift*, Trans. I. Cunnison', 30–86.

[271] The most popular criticism of Mauss is by Derrida who defined gifts as exceeding the constraints of exchange. Derrida, *Given Time*.

criticism.[272] Gift albums such as the one explored in this chapter were possibly located within the matrices of expectation, negotiation, and hierarchy, rooted in a pre-modern system of exchange. In chapter four, we will explore two more albums gifted to Nehru, from a Maussian perspective of exchange and obligation.

At times, the albums were given to Nehru to show a project that he personally may not have had the time to visit. Such albums helped to create an imagery of the developmental work for Nehru without visiting these sites. Album 86 appears to be one such album. I have found no evidence suggesting that Nehru visited this site after a visit he made for its inauguration in February 1949. Compared to the spectacle of Bhakra (to be discussed in chapter three), developmental work on the Ganga Khadar was an ordinary mundane view.

My interest in this album stems from its rudimentary and unpolished form. All photographs and text are pasted manually, with some not following the axis of the page resulting in a rather jarring and disorderly visual aesthetic. Some of the text is also corrected with a pen, sometimes overwriting for spelling mistakes, correcting the grammar and sentence formation in the text (Image 20). Given the condition of the album, I am intrigued to know how did such a rough copy find its way into the Prime Minister's collection? Did the PWD not have the time or money to work on a more formal copy of the album? Possibly the raw nature of this album is due to inadequate funds with which to approach a professional studio, or because the album was made in a haste. However, a more interesting approach for me is to explore the presence of an album as unruly and raw as this one within the larger discourse of bringing order and precision that is articulated through the content of the album. If orderliness and linearity were the hallmark of the new nation's developmental aspirations, how do we see the disorderly and chaotic form of this album and the struggles and problems of developmental work that it reveals? Instead of the statist desire to project a spectacular vision of linear development (such as the Bhakra Dam), this album's significance lies in exposing, from the inside, the fractures in the developmental optics of the postcolonial state.

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[272] For a defence of Mauss against Derrida's criticism, see O'Neill, 'What Gives (with Derrida)?'
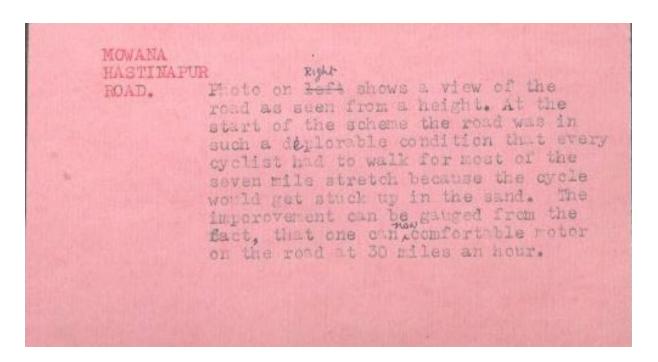
Image 20: PWD, 'Mowana Hastinapur Road', pen corrections on text, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

The album gives details about reconstruction work in the Ganga Khadar area, which is the easternmost region extending along the Ganga in Mawana and Hastinapur blocks. The topography of the region is dotted with several small rivers such as Burhi Ganga, Kali Ganga, Krishna and Hindan, besides the big rivers, Ganga and Yamuna.[273] This caused frequent flooding and poor soil conditions leading to the small and hamletted nature of housing. The area is projected as a challenge for engineers and other developmental experts who aimed to reconstruct it.[274]

At the peak of the Cold War in the 1950s, developmental projects were the meeting grounds of nation-states, international institutions, experts, and their multiple interests. Escobar considered development as a discourse, a particular mode of thinking from which stems the drive to instil a desire to strive towards industrial and economic growth in the 'underdeveloped' countries.[275] Building on Scott's work discussed earlier, along with being a 'mode of thinking', development could also be seen as a mode of 'perception'. Even when development was defined in terms of economic growth, measured through

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[273] Ghazala Hamid's doctoral dissertation offers an in-depth analysis of housing patterns in the region and a detailed topography of the area. Hamid, *Evolution of rural settlements and their variations in Meerut District*, PhD dissertation, Aligarh Muslim University, 2000.

[274] Census Operations Uttar Pradesh, *District Census Handbook*, Meerut, 1961.

[275] Gardner and Lewis, *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge*, 6.

indices such as Gross National Product, Gross Domestic Product, and Per Capita Income, it was never a dry imagination. Certain visual frameworks always accompanied the statistical and mathematical descriptions. The question of how to develop and what constitutes development was tied to the imagination of what development looks like, from its very conception. Theodore Porter has discussed the origin of numbering in society in response to the social scientist's need for statistical tools to examine and map society.[276] This album draws on the politics of expertise, the social origins of statistics and calculability (as argued by Mitchell), and the quantitive language of development, situating the photographs within a broader scientific and technological discourse of 'progress'.

Theoretically, there are divergences in the origin and meanings of 'development'. There is a considerable scholarship that sees development as a depoliticising venture[277] working through the concept of aid transfers in the 1930s. This approach leads us to trace the concept through its multifarious uses by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) set up after the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944, in the Post-World War II context. Timothy Mitchell, in his book *Rule of Experts,* refers to a widespread but thin network of ties and exchange of 'expert' knowledge[278] which included US colleges, social science departments, visit programs to different developmental sites, institutions like the Ford Foundation which had a formidable presence in South Asia in the 1950s, other bilateral aid agencies and so on. Another Foucauldian reference is Escobar's work on development, as he argues that development is constructed through the "invention of poverty",[279] thus exemplifying the de-politicised nature of the process. Yet another approach, led by the work of David Ludden, explores the roots of post-war development in colonialism.[280] Suggesting that the "Development ideology was originally supposed to sustain the empire, not facilitate the transfer of power", Fredric Cooper and Randall Packard point to the imperialist origins of interventionist developmental work in Asian and African postcolonial nations.[281] Atiyab Sultan's work on developmentalism in colonial Punjab challenges the assumption that institutions are the sole legacy of

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[276] Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900*.

[277] Ferguson*, The Anti-Politics Machine.* Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 2002.

[278] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 2002, 7.

[279] See, Escobar, *The Problematization of Poverty*; Also, Escobar, 'The Invention of Development'.

[280] Ludden, 'India's Development Regime'.

[281] Cooper, 'Modernizing Bureaucrats', 64.

colonial rule. Instead, he argues for a close connection between the colonial modes of governance and postcolonial developmental projects.[282]

Later analysis of some advantages of developmental projects suggests that these projects provided people in the colonies with a basis for making claims for economic resources, and for articulating a political voice[283] for recognition within the national polity. In this approach, development is seen through local mobilisation practices of trade unionists, and social and political movements as a tool for engaging with the global discourses of power in the 1940s-50s. Prakash Kumar highlighted the shifts in state-led development trajectories, exploring the constant negotiations at play, thus refuting the claim for a depoliticising potential of developmental projects. His work draws on Partha Chatterjee's argument that the course of development in India has created conditions for the subalterns to demand resources from the state. A similar subaltern reading by Indrajit Roy challenges the depoliticization logic of development, suggesting that, through a rural electrification project in West Bengal, the developmental intervention in effect politicised the villagers. Subir Sinha also notes the radical possibilities of rural mobilisation through village development programs.[284]

While agreeing with the broader Foucauldian arguments around the depoliticising potential of development, as discussed by Fergusson, Escobar and Mitchell, my research is also inspired by Kumar and Sinha's work in the Indian context and attempts to probe the local negotiations and contestations with the grand ideas of development. Another useful reference to analyse the developmental schemes in postcolonial India, is the work of G Aloysius. While his work on nationalism has so far not been used in the context of studying postcolonial development, I intend to employ his structural questions to explore the nature of local engagements with development in rural India and the optical gaps it reveals.

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[282] For reference, see Sultan, 'Malcolm Darling and Developmentalism in Colonial Punjab'. Also, Gyan Prakash sees connections between colonial science and postcolonial nation formation. See, Prakash, *Another Reason*.

[283] Cooper, 'Writing the History of Development,' 14.

[284] On the depoliticization potential of developmental programs, see Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*. Mitchell's work also discusses the depoliticising potential of Expert Rule. A recent turn in scholarship explores the politicising potential of developmental projects. See Kumar, *A Big Machine*. Similar echoes in Sinha, 'Lineages of the Developmentalist State'; and Roy, *The Politics of the Poor in Contemporary India*, 294–338.

The developmental modernity that emerged in the 1950s was a peculiar mix of internationalist as well as nationalist aspirations. The album intersects with these internationalist inspirations and Nehruvian ideas on modernism linked to the historical specificities of the postcolonial nation. At the same time, the ideas of rural development reveal strains of Gandhian thought, with a mix of ideas by Tagore and others involved in reconstruction work. As we go along, we will discuss in detail how each of these ideas plays out throughout the album. Finally, Ambedkar's critique of Nehru and Gandhi's ideas will be useful to draw up the gaps and silences in this album. Against this backdrop, let us now look at the album in detail.

An Introduction to The Village Album
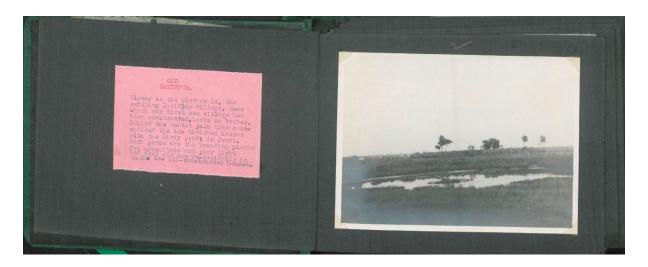
Image 21: PWD, 'Old Latifpur', Album spread with photograph 2, Album 86, NAI. New Delhi

Detail of photograph 2 in Image 21

The album begins with a landscape photograph of a few houses and trees lined up along the horizon, with some water puddles in the foreground (see Image 21). There are no captions in the album, but each photograph is accompanied by a type-written text pasted on a pink scrap of paper. The text tells us about Old Latifpur village. Referring to the 'gloominess' of the photograph, it informs the reader that Latifpur village is as gloomy as the corresponding landscape. The word 'gloom' interestingly, refers to 'darkness' or lack of light, recalling the colonial metaphors of 'saving' the colonised by 'bringing light'.[285] It zooms further into the photograph and brings our attention to the central palm tree in the photograph. Behind this are low thatched houses which almost merge into the grassy foreground. The authors blame the construction of the houses for poor light and foul air. There is a mention of the dirty pond which the authors explain, is the breeding ground for mosquitoes. This photograph, as the authors would have us believe through the accompanying text, is symbolic of the problems of rural India in particular, and the new nation in general. The problems in the physical environment are representative of the social evils plaguing the country and testifies to its underdeveloped image. The houses are not

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[285] Niharika Dinkar has noted the ideological and material influence of lighting in the colonial period. Dinkar, *Empires of Light*; 'Pyrotechnics and Photography'; 'The "New Conquering Empire of Light and Reason": The Civilizing Mission of William Jones'.

merely ill-constructed, but the residents of these houses are effectively breathing foul air and living a poor quality of life in the absence of good light conditions. The structure of houses is emblematic of the 'backward' quality of life of the villagers and their 'gloomy' situation. The text explains to the viewer that the residents are indifferent to the pond, suggesting a lack of health and sanitation consciousness. Interestingly, in his inaugural speech at the Hastinapur reconstruction project, Nehru mentions that the Ganga Khadar area was a wasteland ridden with malaria and one of his first recommendations was to eliminate the disease from the area. This comment must be seen in the context of the malaria epidemic in Egypt (1942-44) and concerns of mosquito growth leading to large-scale development projects, as discussed by Timothy Mitchell in his essay 'Can the Mosquito Speak?'. Towards the later part of this chapter, we will look at his essay to explore the formation of expertise in the context of Album 86.

The introduction to the album reveals what the PWD engineers could not see or chose to unsee. Villages in India were a site of division and exclusion with caste and class being key markers of how people lived. It was a challenge to work out the cost of the house, labour and materials, concerning rural incomes.[286] An article carried in the *Kurukshetra* magazine wrote about the farm workers' condition in India, suggesting that about forty-five per cent of families involved in agricultural labour were in debt. It further noted that casual labour formed the bulk of agricultural labour with the average daily wage between 5 -17 annas[287] for men, 8-10 annas for women and 1-11 annas for children. The landowners owned over eleven acres on average while the agricultural workers owned a meagre two acres of land onaverage, revealing a deep disparity in land ownership across the country.[288] The condition in UP was even worse. The All-India Rural Credit Survey Report (1951-52) shows that almost sixty-five per cent of the total rural families in UP were in debt with an average of Rs 422 per family. It is also important to note here that the per capita income of UP was less than the rest of India between 1948-61, consistently averaging in the range of Rs. 240-261. Besides, the surge of refugees during the post-partition was imminent as UP shares borders with Delhi, pushing the rural economy of the region into a further decline that was recognisable.[289] The introductory text also fails to consider class and caste as factors impacting the design and housing-related decisions in the families from rural UP. To bring out the influence of caste in determining housing structures, Vasant Moon writes about dominant

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[286] C B Patel, 'Special Approach to Rural Housing,' *Marg*, Volume 7, Number 2, March 1954, 58-59. Patel was the Housing Advisor to the Government of India during that period

[287] A former monetary unit in India and Pakistan, equal to one-sixteenth of a rupee.

[288] From an excerpt in *Kurukshetra*, April 1954, 40.

[289] Umrao, *Co Operation in the Rural Reconstruction of Uttar Pradesh*, 48–54.

communities prohibiting oppressed caste groups from using tiles in their houses[290] and Ghazala Hamid notes that most rural poor families lived in a one-room house, often made of local materials such as mud, wood, bamboo, sugarcane leaves, arhar plant stalks, clay and so on.[291]
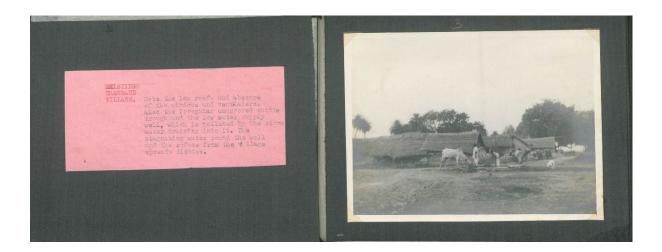
Image 22: PWD, 'Existing Chamraud Village', Album spread with photograph 3, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

Image 22 is a photograph of thatched houses with cattle and man standing outside the houses in the centre of the frame. The text describes this as a picture of the existing Chamraud village. The text asks the reader to specifically note the 'low roof' and the absence of windows and ventilators in the houses. The roof is the most expensive and difficult aspect of house construction in rural areas. Mud roofs were known to keep off internal heat in summers and lasted well, making them the local people's preferred choice.[292] Usually, the lower caste houses had thatched roofs made of phuns, or leaves fastening them with moist branches and string. It is possible that these houses were hand built with locally available materials and were custom-made according to the financial and human resources available at the owner's disposal. Also, each house was personally designed with the resident's preferences, financial means, and social hierarchies in mind. The text constructs a tone of authority that is admonishing and inspectorial in how it perceives the dwellings. Ghazala Hamid's work on rural settlements in Meerut highlights the pragmatic, economic and often circumstantial variables that determine local settlement

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[290] Moon, Omvedt, and Zelliot, *Growing up Untouchable in India.*

[291] Hamid's field material is based on the 1991 census. Hamid, *Rural Settlements*, 292.

[292] Ibid.,279.

decisions.[293] The houses are the best manifestation of the environment and social structure, to be seen through their layout, plan, materials used and morphology. Even though the Ganga Khadar region is a plain area, there are intense variations in the physio-cultural and socio-economic conditions of the regions. These are only amplified by caste structure and religious rituals, all of which impact the housing patterns.[294] Besides the insufficiency of agricultural production, surmounting debts and social inequities, the weather conditions also played a significant role in determining the structure of the houses. North India experienced hot summers and cold winters, therefore the villagers usually preferred mud walls and earthen bricks for construction.[295] The authors of the album do not acknowledge visibility for any of these variables.

The text and the photograph are intended to work together with each filling up the gaps left by the other. At times, the text overwhelms the image, pointing to details not clearly visible in the photograph or seen in the far distance, asking the viewer (Nehru) to imagine more than what is perceptible to the eye. The images show little but represent much more than what they show, through the text accompanying them. The differences between images and language are not merely formulaic matters but are linked to the difference between the speaking self and the 'seen' other, between telling and showing, and between hearsay and eye-witness testimony.[296] In this album, the speaking self of the PWD representative weighs in heavily, dwarfing the act of seeing, and by extension, the subjects 'seen' (the villagers and the village landscape). The textual overlay, in other words, facilitates an 'unseeing' for the PWD team.

Apart from the Railways and the All-India Housing Association, the PWD (at the central and the state level) was involved in extensive construction work during this period.[297] Post-independence, under Nehru, India saw a concerted effort to re-arrange its visual landscape through agencies such as the PWD. The village became an important category under the statist lens and several developmental schemes for re-ordering and reforming the then-existing village. In 1938 when the National Planning Commission first met, the question of how to transform villages was a much-discussed topic. As the new government took charge in 1947, the Constituent Assembly also debated extensively the question

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[293] Ibid, 259.

[294] Ibid, 278.

[295] Patel, 'Special approach to Rural Housing,' 59.

[296] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 5.

[297] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

of whether the village or the individual should be the primary unit of Indian polity.[298] With seventy-five per cent of India's population living in villages, the role of rural development could not be underestimated.[299]

However, given the divergences in the views of key national figures on the presumed role that villages could play in the future of India, the question of what kind of development was right for Indian villages was met with conflicting answers. Three main figures of the nationalist movement – Gandhi, Nehru and Ambedkar didn't agree on their vision of the village. Except for Ambedkar, who articulated a subaltern view of the village, both Gandhi and Nehru's conceptions emerged from certain colonial, and later anti-colonial or nationalist, descriptions of the village. Let us first look at the divergent perceptions of the Indian village.

The Village as a Category

Since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the anti-colonial nationalist movement made attempts to define India's new identity.[300] Emerging middle-class intellectuals and reformers negotiated between past traditions and colonial modernity. A major challenge for these nationalist reformers was to represent India as a single cultural and political entity and imagine unified nationhood for India. As they scrambled for a category that would project a unified framework for the emerging nation, the caste system and village communities emerged as two key concepts which could be universally accepted as the concrete social unit of 'traditional', Non-British India.[301]

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[298] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village', 3344.

[299] Dube, *India's Changing Villages: Human Factors in Community Development*, 3–9.

[300] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village' 3344.

[301] For colonial constructions of the Indian village, Cohn and Guha, 'An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays'; Habib, 'Capitalism in History'. Jodhka, "From 'Book View' to 'Field View'"; For a critical reference on how Indian sociologists and anthropologists saw the village in the 1950-60s, see Srinivas and Shah, "The Myth of Self-Sufficiency of the Indian Village"; Srinivas, The Social Structure of a Mysore Village.

This conceptualisation emerged from a historical colonial ideology, which imagined and essentialised India as a land of "Village Republics".[302] Charles Metcalfe, in a British parliamentary enquiry of 1810, wrote:

> *The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution…but the village community remains the same…[303]*

The idea of the village as the basic unit of Indian life endured and became an essentialised representation of what India was. India's predominantly agrarian economy supported this belief. The ethnographic works of Metcalfe were used by orientalist scholars in the nineteenth century to facilitate the rationalisation of colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent. Henry Maine propagated the idea of a linear evolutionary graph for all societies, with a progression from collective to more individual forms of property ownership.[304] Such scholarship allowed the British to govern through hierarchical dichotomies such as 'the primitive ancient' and 'the rational modern',[305] imaging themselves as rightful heirs of a land where progress was the result of their interventionist presence. This orientalist perception saw the 'village' as 'real India' which, as Jodhka writes, needed to be "recovered, conquered and transformed".

Orientalist ideas also populate the imagination of several nationalist figures who used romantic lexicons to idealise the anti-colonial Indian past.[306] Let us focus on some key ideologues whose views shaped

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[302] Inden, *Imagining India*, 129–34.

[303] Kaye, 'The Life and Correspondence of Charles'.

[304] Naka, *The Village and the City*, 45–46.

[305] Inden, *Imagining India*, 308.

[306] G Aloysius argues that tradition was often invoked in anti-colonial idiom as a reference to India's 'eternal' history. This was a continuation of the 'positive orientalist' attitude of Max Muller-led colonial systems of knowledge production. See, Aloysius interview on nationalism and caste question in India on YouTube channel Dalit Camera, September 2012.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v52acZDxh5M&ab_channel=DalitCamera. Edward Said has noted the orientalist basis of Marx's double vision which saw the colonial rule in India as destructive and regenerating at the same time. Ahmad however points out that Marx, at a later point, saw India through the lens of caste, understood by him as a hierarchical division of labour. Later Namboodripad, building on Marx, questioned the location and loyalty of the dominant intelligentsia of the nationalist movement, showing some overlaps with Aloysius' later critique of the Brahmanical nature of the nationalist struggle

the anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse on the village. Gandhi, Tagore, Nehru, and Ambedkar, all had their distinct perspective on the Indian village. Gandhi and Ambedkar employed the village as a metaphor to mobilise the "common masses"[307]. There was a virtual agreement that the village was the core unit of the traditional Indian social order. In this, Gandhi was influenced by the work of Maine and saw the village as the essence of the Indian civilisation. His views evolved throughout his political career, but by the 1940s he actively propagated the village as an alternative to the capitalist-driven west. Critiquing colonial rule as the major impediment to progress in villages, Gandhi propagated freedom from the colonial rule as a way of ensuring autonomy of the village.[308] He acknowledged that the presence of untouchability and unhygienic conditions were flaws in the village system and pushed for reform at the local level. Abolition of untouchability,[309] cleanliness[310] and self-sufficiency[311] were key concepts around which his ideas for village reform were articulated. Gandhi is a significant figure with respect to village reconstruction efforts in the early twentieth century. Since the late 1920s, he led anti-colonial mass-mobilisations at the rural level.[312] Seeing poverty and villages as synonymous in India,

and the postcolonial state that emerged out of it. For the whole discussion on Said, Marx and Nambodripaad, Ahmad, *In Theory*, 221–42.

[307] Jodhka, Nation and Village', 3344. It is important to add here that the politics of their mobilisation attempts were radically different. On their divergences, see Roy, *The Doctor and the Saint*. I would also like to acknowledge Ranajit Guha's critique of mobilisation as an elite domain that produced vertical historiographies. In the context of this chapter, reference to these three figures is not to understand villagers' responses as effects of leadership, but to understand the structure and positioning of state-led expert reform as it was envisioned.

[308] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village', 3347.

[309] Ambedkar contradicted Gandhian reformist ideas on caste, arguing that the practice of untouchability reflected deeper discriminatory ideas of purity and pollution in the Hindu social order and advocated a complete annihilation of the Hindu order, as opposed to reform. Ambedkar, *Annihilation of Caste; Ambedkar, What Congress & Gandhi Have Done to the Untouchables*. Roy, *The Doctor and the Saint*.

[310] On hygiene and cleanliness as the basis of caste discrimination and exclusion, see Lüthi, Cleansing Pavam. Also see, Gupta, 'Broomscapes'. For scholarship that sees the *Swach Bharat* (Clean India) Campaign by the Government of India through Brahminical ideas of cleansing morality, purity and modern hygiene. Gatade, 'Silencing Caste, Sanitising Oppression'; Kumar, 'Whose Cleanliness?'.

[311] Srinivas and Shah criticise the Gandhian idea of the self-sufficient village arguing that inter village marriage practices, travelling troupes of performers and commonly celebrated festivals, spread of Hinduisation through sanskritisation practices and dependence on towns for specialised services points towards a regionalised cultural and economic history, connecting the village to a wider network, thus debunking the 'village as self-sufficient before the British came' myth. Srinivas and Shah, 'The Myth of Self-Sufficiency of the Indian Village', 1377.

[312] Gandhi's early attempts at rural development can be traced to his efforts at Champaran in 1917 and the constructive program at Sewagram in 1920 and Wardha in 1938. Pandey, 'Gandhian Perspective of Rural Development', 143. Around the same time, Ambedkar also led the Mahad Satyagraha (1927), interjecting the Congress-led elite anti-colonial discourse with an anti-caste ideology. Late 1920s marked the beginning the Gandhi Ambedkar division in Indian political thought, with the Round Table Conference

he articulated for an independence that "begins at the bottom. Thus, every village will be a republic or panchayat having full powers".[313] The reform in the existing village was to be brought through 'volunteers' who prescribed to set codes of morality and social conduct.[314]

Another important ideologue in this context is Rabindranath Tagore. Since the 1890s, Tagore worked on rural reconstruction which he saw as the building up of a human and institutional base necessary for a free nation. Tagore started Sriniketan in 1922 as the rural reconstruction centre of Viswabharati[315] with an intention to make the villager self-reliant in a bid to reduce the gap between the city and the village. He saw a pressing need for the nationalist movement to focus inward on its villages, as the society (*samaj*) according to him, had greater powers than the government.[316] While both Gandhi and Tagore linked their efforts on rural reconstruction with national integration, Tagore did not just focus on the economic aspects of village life, but rather painted a cultural and lyrical picture of what the Indian village could become. 'Life in its completeness' with 'music and readings from the epics', he suggested, was the real essence of Indian villages. "Let a few villages be rebuilt this way, and I shall say they are my India. That is the way to discover the true India."[317] Machinic assistance had its place in Tagore's imagination of the villages of the future as seen by his act of bringing a tractor to Sriniketan as early as 1927,[318] thus contrasting with Gandhian views on machines and technology and aligning (on this ground) with Nehru's post-independence policies. His endeavour to change human attitudes as a

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of 1930 and Gandhi's subsequent fast forcing Ambedkar to withdraw his demands, deepening the chasm in India's nationalist politics. Through all this, the village continued to emerge as politicized category across ideologies.

[313] Pandey, 'Gandhian Perspective of Rural Development', 142.

[314] His ideal village was not located in the past, but in his imagination as he wrote to Nehru in October 1945, "My ideal village exists only in my imagination". Gandhi, *Speeches and Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, 336–44. This brings us back to the idea that the category of the Village was premised more on ideology and imagination, rather than historical realities on the ground.

[315] Tagore turned to educational work, setting up Santiniketan (later Viswa Bharati University) in 1901. Gupta, 'In Pursuit of a Different Freedom'. Sriniketan was established as a part of this educational reform ideology, as an experimental site with the assistance of Leonard K Elmhirst, the President of International Society of Agricultural Economists. Das Gupta, 'Tagore's Ideas of Social Action and the Sriniketan Experiment of Rural Reconstruction, 1922–41'; Mukherjee, 'Sriniketan Experiment in Rural Reconstruction'.

[316] From a speech made by JP Bhattacharjee, chairman of seminar on rural reconstruction, jointly organised by USAID and Sardar Vallabhbhai Vidyapeeth in September 1964 at Vallabh Vidyanagar.

[317] Tagore and Bhattacharya, *Towards Universal Man*, 322.

[318] Das Gupta, 'Tagore's Ideas of Social Action and the Sriniketan Experiment of Rural Reconstruction, 1922–41', 994.

way of creating lasting village reform, as we shall see, finds resonance in postcolonial developmental schemes that strived to modernise the villager in his thought and action.

In the case of Nehru, his book *Discovery of India* recognised the autonomous village community as a functional aspect of Indian society. While acknowledging that the old social structure valued the group more than the individual and emphasised more on duties of the individual, rather than rights, he criticised the old structure for not focussing on progress.[319] Over the years, he grew increasingly intolerant of caste-based hierarchies and saw caste as a non-modern concept.[320] Instead, he spoke of Indian society in terms of classes with a primary division between the peasants (kisan) and the landlords (zamindar). While the peasants were seen as real masses, landlords, according to Nehru, had outlived their days.[321] These real masses, however, were seen as politically docile and fatalistic in their resistance toward new and 'improved' agricultural technology. The way to transform social divisions in rural areas was through state-led initiatives such as the Land Reform policy, which was attempted as a corrective measure towards the inequities of previous land-tenure systems.[322] Nehru wanted to transform the village's social and economic order by using modern technology and saw industrialisation as the evitable next step.[323] While Nehru allied with Gandhi on several ideas such as the revival of the cottage and handicraft industry to boost rural productivity, he did not see the Indian village of the future as economically self-sufficient.[324] Self-governance was to be restricted to the village as an electoral unit, reflected in his support of the Panchayati Raj Act in 1957.[325]

Unlike the rest, Ambedkar grew up in a village and saw it as a site of caste-based oppression, far from the orientalist romance of the Indian village. His anti-caste perception of the village that has been a significant one in contemporary history. Villages in India were divided sites, physically and territorially, with a clear division between the dominant and caste oppressed groups, leading to exclusion and

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[319] Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, 252.

[320] Ibid., 254.

[321] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village,' 3349.

[322] For land tenure patterns in India during the pre-colonial and colonial period, Bekker*, Land Reform Legislation in India*. For the gaps in the ideology and implementation of land reforms, Joshi*, Land Reform and Agrarian Change in India and Pakistan since 1947*.

[323] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village,' 3349.

[324] Jodhka, 3350.

[325] Pathy, 'Panchayati Raj and Decentralization of Political Power'.

systematic oppression of the groups considered 'untouchable'. This included rules of where the 'untouchables' could live, what they could wear, which public areas they could access, what kind of house structure could they live in and so on. Ambedkar perceived Indian villages as the primary site where caste-based exclusion and exploitation was practiced and did not see any possibility of redemption. Instead, he encouraged people to move towards urban settlement. Compared to Nehru and Gandhi, Ambedkar articulated a historicist view rooted in the material inequalities of the village. However, he also saw the village as a universal 'pan-Indian' category like the rest, marking it as a concrete denominator of Indian nationhood.[326]

With independence and partition, Nehruvian ideas of state-led intervention found prominence in the policy framework of postcolonial India while Gandhian ideas continued to influence the community development program and its logic of expert intervention in rebuilding the village. I have noted in the Introduction that despite its criticisms, developmental modernity (seen from below) also offered an emancipatory promise to break the pre-modern cycle of caste hierarchy and an exploitative land ownership pattern. However, as we will see, Ambedkar's critique of the caste-centric nature of the static Indian village was ignored by the policy formulations, leading to a missed opportunity of rendering an equalising developmental modernity in postcolonial India. Without seeing the material reality of the Indian village as rooted in caste, developmentalist interventions were built on a false promise of modernity, a modernity that was rooted in the hierarchical tradition as opposed to what could have been an equality founded on modern-rationalist values.

Internationally, a similar interest in the village was developing. American and European visitors labelled Russia and China as "nations of villages", casting the category of village as anti-progress until the nineteenth century. With the Russian Revolution and the first World War, this conceptualisation changed, and the village began to be rearticulated as a category of social reform. In India, this shift is perceptible through the colonial initiative to set up the Royal Commission for Agriculture in India. Frank Brayne, the Financial Commissioner of the Punjab province, wrote convincingly on the adoption of agricultural cooperatives, new house-keeping methods, and village schools in late 1920s.[327]

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[326] Jodhka, 'Nation and Village,' 3351.

[327] It is important to note that the imperial attention on village reform during this period was driven mainly around agricultural efficiency and public health whereas Gandhi spoke of self-sufficiency and Tagore focused on self-reliance and remaking of the modern 'man'.

By 1930s, the category of the 'peasant' began to play an important political role across the ideological spectrum through Peasant Movements in China. Villages came to be seen as the heart of the nation with 'backwardness' ascribed to an exploitative colonial rule. Nicole Sackley links the transnational interest in rural reform to the Great Depression in the US and a collapse of export markets in India, China, Turkey, and Mexico, which led to a wave of protests and strikes. Rural development schemes were drawn up as an emergency measure to counter the threat of popular revolt. By the time the World was going into the second World War, the phrase 'rural reconstruction' was consolidated as a constellation of ideas and practices across empires and nations. When the War ended, the village already occupied a trans-regional public imagination as the site of reform.[328] While several projects of rural reform were initiated in early twentieth century, the Cold War of the 1940-60s created an urgent geo-political condition for rural reconstruction initiatives.

How does Village Development Look from Above?

As the village became a powerful category through which developmental discourses began to be formulated, the camera was implicated in optical construction of developmental reform. The lens played an important role, not only in documenting the reordering of the village, but also in formulating a visual imagination of what development looks like, and by extension how the future should appear. 'Underdevelopment' had a visual reference, constructed as a sharp counter to the 'developed' world. Numerical indices such as the GDP, calorie intake and mortality rate were formulated through visual references of 'underdevelopment'.

One optical marker of this divide between 'developed' and 'underdeveloped' can be seen in the material used in construction projects. Development was associated with the modernist appeal for stronger and more durable materials like cement and concrete. The notion of using materials that can withstand nature and time is a mark of modernist utopia. Just as dams are man-made wonders because they can tame the fury of the rivers. Materials such as cement, iron and steel are shields against the unpredictability of nature. On the other hand, constructions in the village with their available rock, soil and mud-built structures were emblematic of the vulnerability of human beings against the forces of nature. Modernist re-construction disavowed these materials and preferred concrete as a sturdy and

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[328] Sackley, 'The Village as Cold War Site,' 484-89.

durable material. An article carried out in the *Marg* magazine issue of July 1947 titled '*Rural India and Cement*' advocates for rural "uplift" through "better housing conditions" using cement constructions. Cement is touted as an "ideal building material for the poor man" as it is deemed "permanent, trouble free and economical" in the long run. Adrian Forty has written about the reputation of concrete as an "advanced" or "modern" material which has the potential to put ordinary people (and nations) on par with the wealthier ones. The use of concrete, according to Forty, changed not just people's physical environment but their global self-image. It introduced new principles into design which made newer forms achievable, supporting the modernist aspiration of overpowering natural limitations. It was relatively cheap, easier to bind and therefore did not require skilled labour to use it in construction. Internationally, concrete played an important role in the reconstruction of the world after the Wars. However, Forty points out that this once alluring material fell out of fashion in the West after the Soviets used it for their reconstruction. It was labelled as 'stuff for the poor' and stigmatised as 'cheap' during the Cold War.[329] The album highlights this aspect of the developmental imagination. None of new houses are built with locally available soil or mud. In a strong, almost rigid preference for the modernist notion of durability and strength against natural factors, usually the new houses are constructed with concrete cement and have iron sheet roofs.[330]
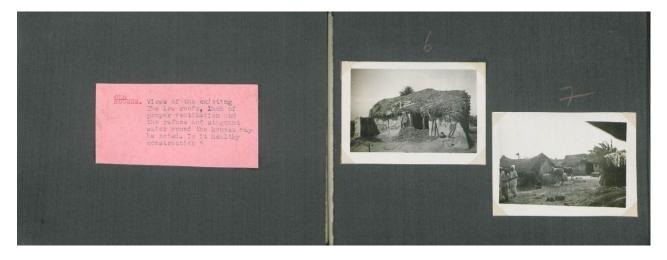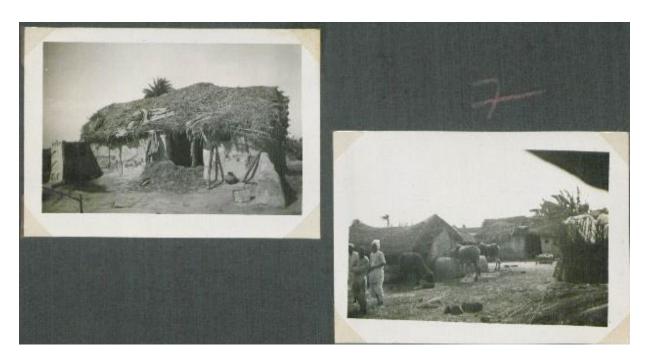
Image 23: PWD, 'Old Houses', Album spread with photographs 6-7, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

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[329] Adrian, 'Concrete*?*''.

[330] The Gandhian anti-colonial mass-mobilisation also saw the lack of cleanliness as a rare flaw in otherwise 'ideal' villages, and a ground for intervention by 'volunteers'. In the postcolonial period, this trope continues as lack of cleanliness and hygiene becomes a justification for postcolonial expert reform. An article from 1947 reflects the association of concrete to cleanliness, village reform and affordability, "Rural India and Cement," *Marg*, Volume 1, Number 4, July 1947.

Detail of Image 23 with photographs 6-7.
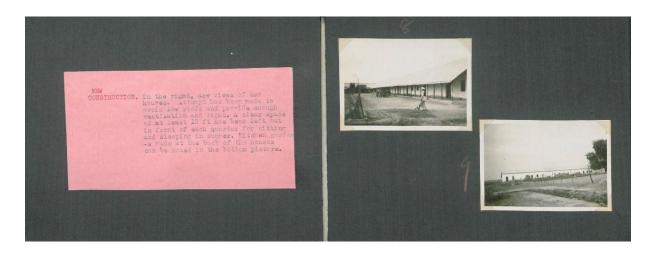
Image 24: PWD, 'New Construction', Album spread with photographs 8-9, Album 86, NAI. New Delhi

Image 23 shows two photographs of village structures before the re-construction began. Both pictures reflect the vulnerability of housing structures. The vulnerability was seen as a prime example of the village's 'backwardness'. In contrast, Image 24 shows new constructions with sheeted roofs and wooden pillars stretched along the length of the barrack. Single individualized housing structures have been replaced by structures that are much bigger in size and length. For a nation still struggling with the trauma of dislocation that partition brought in, the preference for seemingly durable materials could also be read as a reflection of the struggle to overcome their own vulnerability. This need for security

in a vulnerable time is seen in several other ways. An article listing the main requirements for housing design mentions security against burglary as one of the foremost requirements, mirroring the need for safety in partition-induced chaos in the years after independence.[331] Similarly, newspaper advertisements for Godrej locks lure the reader to buy the locks as a safeguard against vulnerability. Godrej archives reveal that sale of locks increased multi-fold in the post-partition context.[332] Partition induced a sense of chaos that triggered vulnerability even for those who did not relocate. It created an environment of mistrust which transformed into a collective need for security, often time seen through varied markers in everyday life such as the use of materials like concrete for building their homes, or a heavy sale of locks to guard personal possessions.

These new constructions are reminiscent of the urban dwellings marked by their same-ness of shape and angular geometrical lines. An interesting site to study the optics of urban housing is the 1956 Hindi-feature film *Jagte Raho* (1956) set in a large multi-floor urban complex.[333] The complex, in an allegorical reference to the diversity of the Indian nation (discussed in Chapter One), is depicted as a site for communal living for people from different states, with varying levels of income, speaking different languages. While the differences are marked aloud, there is a certain homogeneity in residents' thoughts and behaviour – both social and moral. While the film critiques the moral degradation in urban areas, a theme common in several films of that time, my interest here is to explore the optics of development in urban India, employed critically by the makers here. One of the main images recurring in the film is the housing complex where the plot unfolds. It is a multi-storey building with multiple long winding staircases connecting one floor to another. The housing complex also has several sections, each looking exactly the same as the other, differentiated only by a number. From the inside and out, the housing structure in the film is marked by striking homogeneity. As the action builds up towards absurdity before the final emancipatory climax scene, the housing structure looks increasing the same and confusing to the protagonist who is mistaken for a thief as he tries to escape the complex. His attempts to locate an exit are thwarted by the homogeneity of the structure, forcing him to go around in loops throughout the complex–a motion that can be interpreted as an ocular reference to the criticism of the postcolonial nation-state as stuck in an endless loop. In the final section of this chapter, we will discuss how the 'ocularity' of this loop was employed by several critics as a way to challenge the linearity of statist vision. In the film, individual flats are lined up on both sides along rectangular

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[331] See, 'Low-Cost Housing Exhibition,' *Marg*, Volume 7, Number 2, March 1954.

[332] Reference from Godrej Archives, Mumbai.

[333] The 1956 film Jaagte Raho by Shombhu Mitra and Amit Maitra was critically acclaimed parody of the modernist nation. Mukhopadhyay, 'Investigating the Manifestation of Socio-Political Reflection in Jagte Raho(1956)'. Also, see, S Chakravarty, 'National Identity and the Realist Aesthetic'.

hallways. From one edge along the hallway on each floor, the protagonist sees lines of doors and windows without any decoration or any effort at individualisation. As the protagonist frantically runs through the rectangular hallways, the geometry of the design is strikingly angular and cold, with the angry mob of residents following him blindly, baying for his blood, uninterested in his innocence.
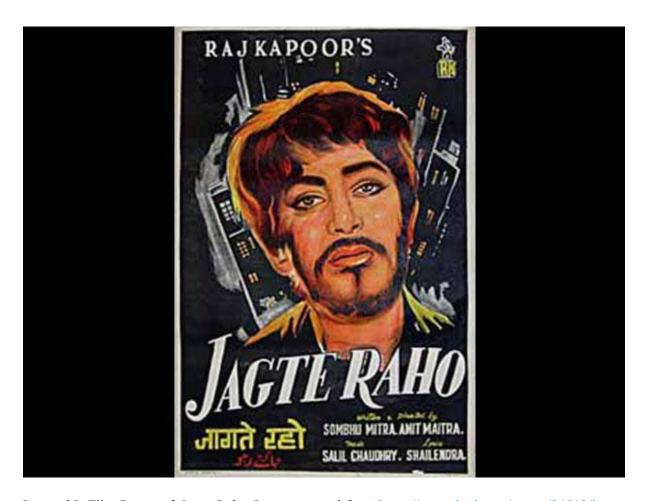
Image 25: Film Poster of *Jagte Raho*, Image sourced from https://posteritati.com/poster/34513/jagte-raho-1956-indian-poster, August 08, 2022.

A poster of the film shows the housing structure from the outside (Image 25). The face of the protagonist is framed at the centre, looking out to the audience with deep desperate eyes, with a night view of the urban complex in the background. Throughout the film, he does not speak (except for his short monologue at the end). Much of his characterisation is provided through the camera which gives ample focus to his face and eyes. His facial expressions range from the desperation of a man looking for drinking water to the shock of being mistaken as a thief in an unknown city dwelling, to his exasperation at being unable to explain his innocence, to the exhaustion of running around the long, repetitive, geometrical corridors of the building, to the terror of being attacked by a huge mob. His face is the centre of all action in the plot. The housing is marked by uniformity and clinical precision of design.

Windows are lined at perfect right angles to each other. During the night, buildings are only seen by the electricity. The film projects cities as sites with access to modern wonders of electricity but marred by an ocular homogeneity derived from the clinical precision of sharp lines and angular designs. Here, I am reminded of Liz Well's articulation of American modern photography as an emphasis on the formal 'geometry' of images, literally and metaphorically offering new angles of vision.[334] The film poster brings out differential dynamics of angularity and linearity that was part of the statist vision of the time. Its juxtaposition with the helpless face of a villager who is at the mercy of this modernist vision (and its moral debasement seen in the film) is interesting as it highlights the overlaps which are useful for our study of Album 86. While the film tries to provide a critical view of the state's modernist aspirations, it builds its criticism through the face of a disenfranchised villager. This portrayal finds a parallel in the state-led developmental reconstruction, built on the idea of the villager as ignorant and naïve. Redemption in the film happens when an innocent child guides the lost and confused protagonist out of the housing complex. The film, despite its progressive criticisms of statist developmental modernity, places the blame on the 'urban' residents of the housing complex, portraying the infantile state as the final hope, one that does not differentiate and offers unbiased help. Thus, the film poster and the photographs in Album 86, although products of two completely different narratives overlap in terms of how they articulate the villager as a disenfranchised citizen who is helped by an unbiased eye of the state to reach the next developmental goal in his journey.

Paradoxically, peasant movements across India had been successful in ushering in Land Reforms.[335] Why did the statist and popular imagination of the village overlook its existence as a site of active resistance? Why was the Villager projected as ignorant and disenfranchised, with a lack of agency? The politics of this projection can be comprehended by investigating the origins of the Community Development Program (henceforth, CDP) in India.

The Community Development Program (CDP) was formally inaugurated in October 1952 with the aim of alleviating India's chronic food shortage and transforming the village and villagers, the CDP was a state-engineered initiative. As Thorner points out, unlike the other prominent rural initiative of Land Reforms, no peasant organisation sloganeered for the CDP.[336] It was a follow up of a bilateral technical

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[334] Wells, *Photography*, 21.

[335] On agrarian unrest in UP, see Gould, 'Politics of Agrarian Unrest in UP Who Co-Opted Whom?'.

[336] Thorner, 'Nehru, Albert Mayer, and Origins of Community Projects', 111.

cooperation agreement between India and the US, offering a comprehensive program focussing on overall development of villages through outside intervention.[337]

CDP's origin can be traced to several previous rural reform measures such as Hamilton's work in Sunderbans, Brayne's work in Gurgaon, North India, Hatch's work in Travancore, Tagore's work at Sriniketan and Gandhi's efforts for rural upliftment.[338] Closer to Independence, American national Albert Mayer met Nehru in 1945 and spoke about village betterment, using scientific terms, and calling for an empiricist approach to rural development.[339] The initial plan was chalked out in December 1945, defining the redevelopment of the village in terms of construction using cheap housing material, spatial organization, and environmental sanitation. Accordingly, Nehru invited Mayer to be an adviser for planning village reconstruction and ordered development of community life in rural areas.[340] Mayer selected Etawah, a district in UP as his model site of work, with an aim to modernise village life. For Nehru, Etawah was an opportunity to demonstrate India's global prestige, and for the US, it offered an American 'model for working in developing nations.[341] The scale and ambition of the intervention at

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[337] It introduced a system of village-level workers on the lines of the US department of agriculture's "country agents", whose job was to "instruct the villagers". Maheshwari, Rural Development in India; Thorner, 'Nehru, Albert Mayer, and Origins of Community Projects', 119. Subir Sinha points out that the CDP connected villages in India to the circuit of state power. Sinha, 'Lineages of the Developmentalist State'.

[338] The region had witnessed several other attempts at rural reconstruction from independent organizations like the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission, YMCA, the Servants of India society and so on. By the late 1940s, India was dotted with a variety of rural improvement projects created by Indian nationalists, British civil servants, and US missionaries. In 1951, reformer Vinoba Bhave launched the Bhoodan movement asking landowners excess land to share it with those who did not have. The All India Khadi and village Industries Board started an Intensive area Scheme in 1954 in Benaras district. Hindustan Lever Limited, a private company that owned Associated Cement Company (ACC) was also involved in rural development initiatives in Ghaziabad District. See, Umrao, Co Operation in the Rural Reconstruction of Uttar Pradesh, 64–65.

[339] Thorner, 'Nehru, Albert Mayer, and Origins of Community Projects', 112.

[340] From a letter written by Nehru to Mayer on May 1, 1945. Reproduced from Ibid., 118.

[341] Nick Cullather's work elaborates on the American interest in India in the mid-twentieth century. While India possessed a negligible strategic weight for US until the late 1940s, the next decade saw the US taking considerable interest in India, which along with China, came to be seen as global contenders in the race for economic development. While the US government was not involved with Mayer's work initially, soon the Ford Foundation and Cornell Project took interest. Cullather, 'Hunger and Containment'. Also, Sackley, 'The Village as Cold War Site,' 494.

Etawah in its theatrical impulse, can be read as a defining "feature of high-modernist postcolonial state with a prerequisite of legibility".[342]

Around the same time, a refugee town was built at Nilokheri in East Punjab for three-thousand Hindu and Sikh refugees in the aftermath of the partition. Loveridge argues that Independent India's push towards rural reconstruction must also be seen as a crisis of post-Partition refugee rehabilitation. Labelled by Nehru as the 'road to new India', Nilokheri was unique as it represented a complete and self-sufficient town built by partition refugees.[343] This started with Surendra Kumar Dey establishing a vocational training centre titled *Mazdoor Manzil* (worker's house/destination) for the refugees at Kurukshetra camp in December 1947. The goal was to emphasize the intrinsic value of 'work' in rebuilding lives destroyed by partition[344]. With the approval of the Ministry of Rehabilitation, Dey led the establishment of a model township eighteen kilometres south of the camp, in the Muslim-evacuated village of Nilokheri. This site of Nilokheri also emerged as an international development paradigm in the 1950s.[345] Scholars have also written about the role of post-partition rehabilitation in reshaping rural east Punjab. The work at Nilokheri was more than just a simple rural reshaping of east Punjab.[346] It was projected as a model for rural development across the nation. 1953 onwards, *Kurukshetra* magazine regularly published first-hand accounts of village work, emerging as a (government owned) space for discussion on rural development across South Asia. In August 1952, Nilokheri hosted a training for development officers, who later went on to work with the CDP formally inaugurated in October 1952, thus tying it to the broader network of rural development in the country.

I have discussed Nilokheri and Mazdoor Manzil, Etawah and the CDP to give a background of the discourse of rural development prevalent in the post-partition UP and Punjab region at that time. A result of a reciprocal influence between trans-national interests and domestic necessities, these projects had a visual currency within the global development movement of the 1950s and were projected models to be replicated across different geographical and social variables. The logistical investment in the careful construction of these models hints at the significance of an optical reference for rural

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[342] ibid.

[343] Loveridge, 'Between Hunger and Growth,' 57–61.

[344] For S K Dey's vision for Nilokheri, see Dey, *Nilokheri*.

[345] Loveridge, 'Between Hunger and Growth,' 56–57.

[346] For a reference on the impact of partition on east Punjab, see Kudaisya, 'The Demographic Upheaval of Partition'.

development. This background, I anticipate, will be necessary as we study Album 86 and examine the work of the PWD on the Ganga Khadar project.

Constructing State Presence in Non-State Spaces

J Scott suggests that the creation of 'state spaces' has been a prerogative of rulers even before colonial times. In the postcolonial period, such developmental projects enabled the creation of 'state spaces' for a new nation-state struggling to establish legitimacy amidst the chaos of the post-partition climate. The effect of developmental schemes thus lies in what it replaces (the non-state spaces) as much as in the degree to which it lives up to its rhetoric of reform,[347] thereby integrating the new regions in the nation-state's regime of calculability. Mitchell has discussed the politics of calculability integral to the optics of developmental reform. Constructing an optics of underdevelopment creates legitimacy for the nation-state (and imperial powers in the Cold War) to intervene with solutions to claim legitimacy. The figure of the developmental 'expert', both national and transnational, was projected as a transformational agent, one who could lift backward villagers from underdeveloped status up to their developmental potential.[348] This category of expert was a hierarchical category that ranged from the global expert to the local expert, each armed with differential possibilities of ground-level engagement.[349]

On the national level, the expert's presence played a pedagogic role, oscillating between the ideas of social reform as a positivist scientific project and as a culturally specific nationalist-moral project of social uplift. In the context of this album, the PWD engineer emerges as the transformational agent and the expert figure. This section explores how photography and the album form have been used by this expert engineer (as an acting agent of the nation-state) within the optical politics of development and underdevelopment. A prominent section in the album is devoted to discussion on 'modern' systems of

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[347] This idea of using developmental work to transform sites with relatively lesser state presence into a "state space" is drawn from Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 191.

[348] In a global context, Sackley suggested that American 'expert' intervention in rural development projects across the world was a direct result of their failure to penetrate rural China. Sackley, 'The Village as Cold War Site,' 491.

[349] This aspect of a hierarchy of expertise and tensions between global and local forms of expertise was highlighted by Krishna Kumar Khosla, a civil engineer in service from 1965-2000 at the Bhakra Beas Management Board. He elaborates on the experience of working with American Engineers who were regarded as 'more expert' in comparison to Indian engineers working on the Bhakra Dam. Personal interview at his home at Nangal, Punjab in January 2019.

water usage. Image 26 discusses existing water supply in villages pointing to *kutcha* or *pucca* shallow wells. According to the PWD staff, the wall of the well is so low that water around the mouth flows into the well polluting the water inside. Another photograph shows a cow drinking water from a bucket near the mouth of the well, with two men standing on the fence overseeing the cattle. In the background, we see more cattle and a hut, with some trees.
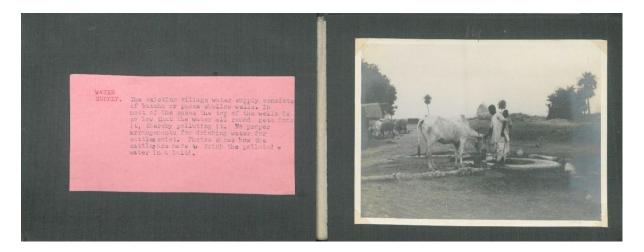
Image 26: PWD, 'Water Supply', Album spread with photograph 14, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

Detail of Image 26 showing photograph 14.

Seeing the above photograph, one can wonder if the PWD engineers in charge of overseeing developmental projects in the village saw the villagers engaging in what was perceived to be an 'unhealthy behaviour' (cattle polluting water) and decided to take a photograph. It seems probable that this photograph was taken to document 'unmodern' and 'unsanitary' practices in this particular village and extrapolate this perception to all the villages under the Ganga Khadar project. If that was not the case, it appears that this could be one of the stock photographs of the PWD, adjusted or cropped to place the cattle drinking water at the centre of the frame, to prove the point being made in the corresponding text in this album. Whether the image was produced by cropping or framing adjustments, we can safely assume that the PWD engineers were as interested in documenting the perceived deficiencies of the villagers as in changing them. They were not merely change-makers, but also documenters, gathering visual evidence of the absence of development.

The presence of the experts is validated only when there is sufficient evidence of under-development. As we see in this photograph, and many others in the album, the PWD engineers are interested in the visuality of backwardness, much like the colonial predecessors. The village acts as the precise 'other', and its inadequacy legitimises the moral presence of the experts. In this context, the photograph plays a critical role, acting as a living justification for the need for an expert. Gemima Scott reminds us that it is not the photograph but the bias in the photograph that is historically informative.[350] What was photographed, how it was composed and what was left out by the editor/album makers are choices that reveal a particular moment in history. Why was the PWD team in this village interested in labelling the villagers as backward and unhygienic? Perhaps because that kept their jobs in demand, to validate the need for hiring them, and allowed their opinions and discourse on development to reign over the lifestyle and thinking of the common villagers. The PWD staff here, and by extension the techno-scientific frame of state-led development, tries to construct their presence by creating a need for its expertise so that it can validate its discourse on development. Photography can be understood for its role in the state-making exercise of the postcolonial period.

Another evidence of constructing state presence in this album can be seen in the repetitive use of 'before-after' sequencing style. Image 30 shows two photographs pasted on the same page, each showing the mouth of the well from a different angle. Photograph 15 is an aerial view of the well showing the bricks and rocks in its vicinity, and the corresponding text describes the water in this well

[350] G Scott, 'Putting Women in the Picture,' 89.

as "tapped from unhealthy strata". Photograph 16 shows the mouth of the tube well surrounded by a puddle of water, which the reader is to understand as the newly changed environment ensuring that "water from healthy strata is available.". The corresponding text fills any gaps in understanding for the reader and further explains the earlier stage and the new construction.
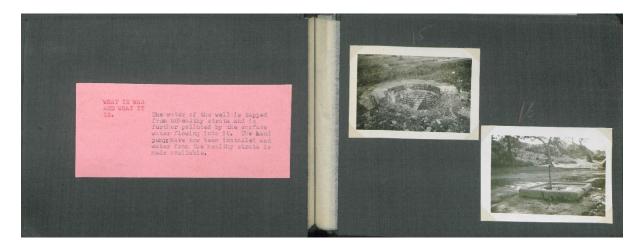
Image 27: PWD, 'What It Was And What It Is,' Album spread with photographs 15-16, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

The 'before-after' style of sequencing creates a vision of the PWD team for the viewer even though there is no photograph that depicts the PWD Engineers. The transition from the *before* to the *after* is possible only through the active presence of the PWD staff. Both photographs in Image 27 are, therefore, not merely photographs of the tube well. Together, they create a vision of men in uniform walking around, leading, supervising, and providing expertise to ignorant villagers, in the presence of concrete and tools scattered around the site, all of which finally resulted in the tube well being set up. As we can see, these photographs play an important function in this attempt to create an expert presence on the developmental site. Interestingly, there isn't a single photograph of any PWD team member in this album. As an object that was to be given to the Prime Minister and which was supposed to make a case for engineer's work in the Ganga Khadar area, this album, despite having thirty-nine photographs does not have any ocular space for the figure of the expert engineer. His presence is created through sequencing patterns described above and through the text that provides additional information about the work done. Several other albums in the archives documenting similar developmental themes often carry photographs of working engineers as men dressed in trousers and shirts, directing other labouring staff, or engaged in a deep discussion reflecting the intellectual aspect of their work. Album 86 stands out for its attempt to construct an engineer's presence through an ocular absence of the expert figure, instead projecting his existence through the problems encountered and solved.
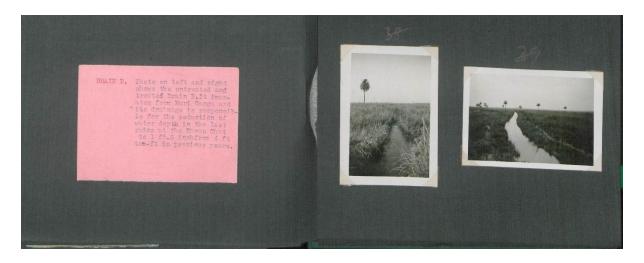
Image 28 : PWD, 'Drain B', Album spread with photographs 38-39, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi.

Detail of Image 28 showing photograph 39.

The point I am making can be further understood by looking at the cyclical construction of the album. When the first photograph (Image 21) is seen in juxtaposition with the last (photograph 39 in Image 28), we can see that both are similar in their composition, depicting trees along the horizon and water in the foreground. Yet Image 21 showed the backward nature of rural life, while Image 28 emphasises re-constructed modernity after the intervention by the PWD engineers, and by extension the

postcolonial state. The trees and the water remain the same, but none is untouched. Everything has been altered by the developmental intervention. Much like the postcolonial state, the engineer in Album 86 is conspicuous by his absence, constructing himself through a display of change and reconstruction.

In extension to the point being made here, I want to add an observation about the role of the photographic form in generating validation for the positivist techno-scientific imagination of the postcolonial state. The 'before-after' model discussed earlier has been used multiple times in the album to create the presence of the engineer figure. However, it is interesting to note that sometimes the content of the 'before' and 'after' photographs does not match the corresponding text. For instance, Images 32-33 show tube-well installation, continuing the familiar discourse on unhygienic villagers being taught to live 'better' through the developmental work of the pedagogic state. Except that none of the photographs shows a tube well clearly.
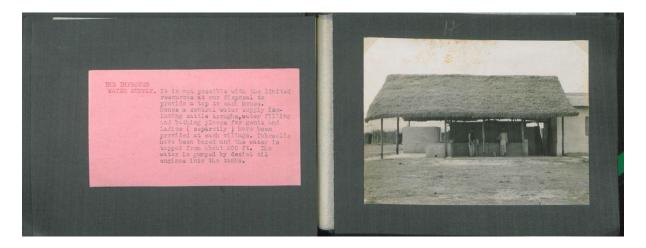
Image 29: PWD, 'The Improved Water Supply', Album spread with photograph 17, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi
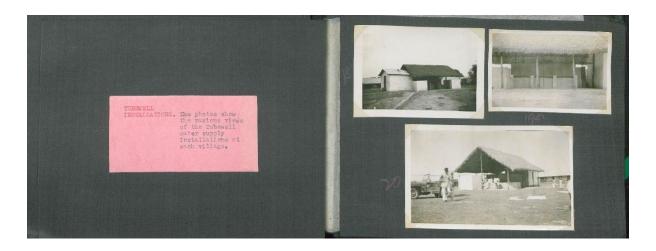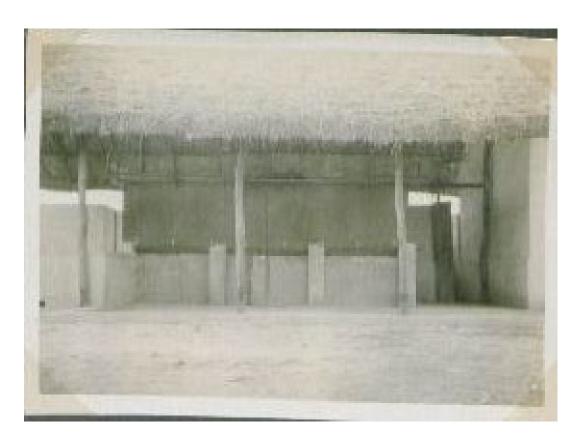
Image 30: PWD, 'Tube well Installation', Album spread with photographs 18,19 and 20, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

Detail of Image 30 showing photograph 19

Photographs 18, 19 and 20 are similar, all showing the shed. Photograph 19 repeats the scene and angle of photograph 17. Intended to show improved water supply through new tube wells, the photographs 17-20 do not communicate any such 'improvement'. However, these misplaced text and photographic combinations are not only a result of the album makers' callousness. They reveal the perfunctory function of photographs as proof irrespective of what is seen in the images. The mismatch and repetition

of content do not seem to matter as long as photographs are pasted alongside the text. Their existence proves the point being made, whether or not we see what is being shown. That a mismatched album like this, found its way to the Prime Minister's Office, could be interpreted as suggestive of the value of photographs in the technocratic discourse of the time. Photography as a form, with its positivist connotations and its increasing relevance as a world language (discussed in chapter one) performatively, lend credibility to this narrative. Its authority in making a point is more important than whether or not the content of the photographs accurately represents the point being made. Photography's presence and its indexical role as a witness 'who has been there' surpass its representative ability.

The use of photography in this album points attention to something beyond its photographic content, reiterating the point made earlier about photographs constructing a presence for absences. Whether it is the ocular absence of the state or the PWD engineer or the tube well construction, all of these absences are compensated by the photographic 'form' in the album. This includes the use of photographic form to document 'unwanted' behaviour of the villagers, through a sequential pairing of before-after photographs, through the cyclical nature of the album narrative or the use of the photographic form in its positivist role as a witness. The absences in the photographic frame are 'formally' compensated to construct a presence of the postcolonial state in presumed non-state spaces. Seeing has been equated with knowing,[351] making photography one of the sites of constructing knowledge about the postcolonial state. The state manifests itself to the eye of its citizens through its agents-the government officers and their ability to alter the environment, as seen in Album 86. In the absence of any Engineer figure, this album effectively uses the potential of photographic form to generate knowledge, and by a Foucauldian extension, power, that supplements the postcolonial state's ability to define what is development for its citizens.

Constructing Engineer's Expertise Through The 'Problems' Encountered

As discussed earlier, how the village *must look* was determined by a bureaucratic logic that was foundationally aesthetic and allowed reproducibility.[352] New roads in the village were an important visual metaphor in the statist vision of linearity and forward movement. A significant section in this

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[351] For an example of how imaging technologies provided a site for knowledge production in the 1950s-60s, see Van Helvoort and Sankaran, 'How Seeing Became Knowing'.

[352] Scott, 'Putting Women in the Picture,' 89.

album is dedicated to roads. The textual introduction informs the viewer that there were no good roads in the region before the start of the redevelopment scheme. The only means of commuting available to the villagers was through cart tracks. The text outlines the difficulties faced by the engineers in reconstructing roads – seasonal interruptions and bad conditions of the roads made it challenging to ferry raw materials for new construction. This section will probe the dissonances that arise when the optics of linearity and progression seen through individual photographs in this album are juxtaposed with the disorderliness and chaos projected onto the form of this album. Let us now explore individual photographs and their sequencing on roads in Khadar.
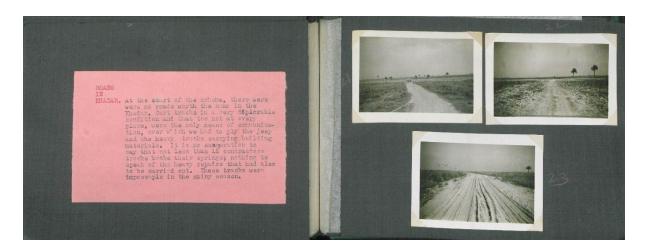
Image 31: PWD, 'Roads In Khadar', Album spread with photographs 21, 22 and 23, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi
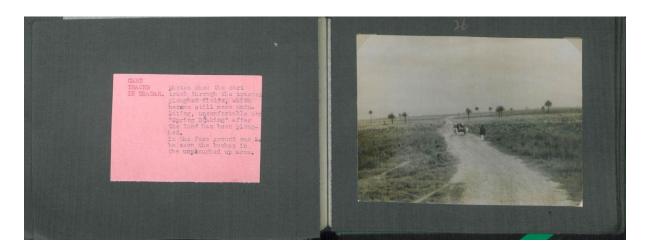
Image 32: PWD, 'Cart Tracks In Khadar', Album spread with photograph 26, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

Image 31 shows three photographs pasted on the right-hand page of the album, accompanying a text on "Road in Khadar" pasted on the left page. Each photograph is a frontal view of rural cart tracks across similar-looking barren horizontal landscapes. Shot in daylight, each photograph frames the road at the centre, drawing attention to the muddy, unruly, and rough nature of the surface. The texture of the soil is palpable in two of the three photographs. The presence of mud and soil is presumed to be sufficient proof of poor and impassable road condition and is expected to corroborate the textual account provided. The photographs are supposed to highlight the undulating, uncomfortable and spring-braking nature of the land after tractors ploughing the nearby fields have moved over it. The text in Image 32 draws special attention to the bushes in the foreground of the photograph. Again, soil, mud, and bushy vegetation are constructed as visible markers of "poor transport conditions and connectivity".
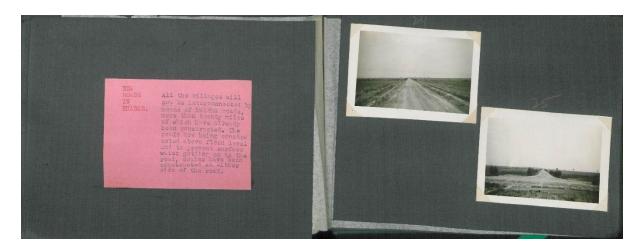
Image 33: PWD, 'New Roads In Khadar', Album spread with photographs 24-25, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

Image 33 gives an account of the work done by the PWD engineers, showing the new roads built. Two photographs are presented as representative markers of the new roads, alongside a text that informs the reader (Nehru) that new *katcha* [raw] roads of around twenty miles have been constructed. And that this network of *katcha* roads interconnects all the villages in the region and is built with 'state-of-the-art' knowledge such as flood reduction techniques and connected drainage systems. At a cursory glance, these photographs look similar to the photographs in Image 31. However, an interesting aspect to note here is the worm-eye perspectival framing of photograph 25 (in Image 33) which is used to create a sense of enormous depth (or distance, in this case). The chosen perspective makes the road appear long and broad. Compositional and editing skills are used to prove the point about building better, longer, and broader roads, in contrast to the wavering and rough cart tracks in Image 31. In congruence with the discussion in the previous section, the album once again reveals a conscious use of photography to create an interventionist presence of the State, counterposing the messy and rough terrain of rural cart

tracks with the new road constructions. However, given the small size of individual photographs used in the page spreads and the homogeneity of the landscape in all the photographs showing roads, the impact of the conscious use of photography seems to be lost in the album space.

Detail of Image 33 showing photograph 25

Distance is repeatedly highlighted in new road constructions using photographic techniques, suggesting an informed and conscious use of the photographic medium to serve the desired purpose. Distance is an element of calculability symbolising human achievement and ingenuity in overcoming the forces of nature. Mitchell, in his book *Rule of Experts* talks about the politics of calculation which allows those in positions of authority to "establish equivalences, contain circulations, identify social actors or agents, make quantities and performances measurable and designate relations of control and command".[353] In this caption and throughout the album, we see numbers being used as a way to measure the performance of the PWD staff. The figures also legitimate the presence of experts in these villages and put into effect relations of control between the experts and the villagers. Mitchell reminds us that the politics of calculability requires a human agency – social agents who have the ability to calculate, are counterposed

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[353] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 8–9.

with those who do not have this facility.[354] This opposition becomes a justification for the politics of improvement in a developmental framework. The outcome of reform projects on the ground was not to be measured in the success or failure of the development as envisaged. Rather, the result of the reform projects resides in ensuring a "complex re-arrangement of social practices", made possible by this politics of calculability.[355] This element of calculability finds an optical resonance in the ways some of the photographs are framed in the album. For instance, Image 34 shows the view of the Mowana – Hastinapur Road. Photograph 28 pasted vertically on the right edge of the album page is taken from a height, using photographic depth to create a semblance of *distance*, reiterating the point made earlier about the conscious use of photographic conventions to develop the narrative of this album.
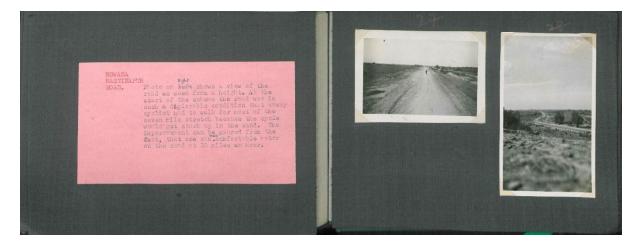
Image 34: PWD, 'Mowana Hastinapur Road', Album spread with photograph 27-28, Album 86, NAI, New Delhi

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[354] Ibid.,10.

[355] Ibid.,14.

Detail of Image 34 showing photograph 28

Mitchell's essay, *Can the Mosquito Speak*? argues that the politics (of numbers) was working to simplify and straighten out the contradictions in the world, by creating the power of 'expertise' through a reductionist binary opposition between those who know (the numbers) and those who don't,[356] and between science and nature.[357] Through a series of before-after photographs, this album constantly alludes to this binary. Individual photographs and sequencing patterns are used to project the presence of the experts on the landscape of Ganga Khadar. How did the landscape appear 'before outside expertise touched it, contrasting with the appearance 'after' techno-scientific expertise touched the messy and backward village after science touched Nature? Sequencing of the individual photographs attempts to convince the viewer that Nature transformed after contact with science, and the village transformed after contact with the PWD expert engineers. However, juxtaposing the narrative of individual photographs with the form of Album 86 as an object - one which is self-described as 'problems' faced by engineers in developing Ganga Khadar, allows us to get a glimpse into the contested nature of expertise.

Drawing on Mitchell's argument, to suggest that rather than external expertise working its way in an alien site of the village, expertise was formed through the engagement of engineers with village realities. PWD engineers became experts 'through' their work in development projects such as these. The PWD engineers did not know in advance, even though they claimed to. It was through the problems encountered, on display in this album, that the expertise took shape.[358] Album 86 is proof of the contested and ambiguous nature of that engagement.

Mitchell redefines expertise in the mundane everyday work of visiting sites, negotiating with team members, drawing out plans, overlooked details, measurements that do not fit and so on – arguing that all there together construct 'developmental work'. There is no expert imagination that is translated into reality on the ground, no prior scientific knowledge that tames the 'unruly nature'. Such an understanding disrupts the top-down perspective of development as a one-way transfer of knowledge or skills. For example, it is the countless hours spent working on the project, the conversations with people to understand what they use and what they don't, daily supervision of raw materials, transport, and logistics, negotiating with team members, arbitrating with villagers, incorrect measurements and the mistakes made, that define PWD expertise (and its failure). From this understanding, the text in Image 31 discusses the problems of ferrying raw materials on rural cart tracks and the twelve jeeps

[356] *Mitchell,* 'Can the Mosquito Speak?' in *Rule of Experts,* 32.

[357] Ibid.,33.

[358] Ibid.,33–34.

whose springs were broken due to the rough natural terrain of the rural cart tracks. Photographs on the corresponding page when seen with this text, become symbolic of the resistance to developmental intervention, instead of representing an image of backwardness that they were projected to be. If we agree with Mitchell's argument that expertise is not pre-formed, but constructed on the ground through the resistances encountered,[359] the text and photograph combinations in the album can be interpreted as more than mere representations of engineers' work in the Khadar project. These combinations can be read as the messy ground of development itself, the foundation upon which PWD expertise was constructed.

While the state vision would like us to believe that development is in the spectacles of numbers – length, depth, and height (see the discussion on the height of Bhakra Dam in chapter three), development is constructed through resistances and problems encountered in the exchange between PWD engineers and villagers. The binary of concrete state versus messy nature though developed through sequencing of individual photographs in the album dissolves when the album is seen as a unified object produced through the tensions and resistances around the development on the ground. The messy and non-homogenous character of these resistances faced by the PWD can be seen in congruence with the messy and difficult-to-tame character of Nature itself. It is this very character of Nature that produced expertise, refuting its claims of techno-scientific origins.[360] The form of Album 86 is symbolic of the construction of PWD expertise through its problems – the unruly cart tracks and the messy nature that it had set out to replace. It is the dissonances between what was planned and what the encountered-on ground that PWD expertise takes form, seen through this album, not just representatively, but also structurally.

The form of the album thus contradicts its explicit contents at different points, reiterating the argument made earlier about conscious use of photographic strategies being lost in the intimate form of the album. Album displays multiple desires. Claim for authority based on expert knowledge is accompanied by a modernist impulse to segregate the boundaries of order and disorder, progress, and backwardness. The conscious selection of individual photographs and their sequencing in the album are representative of the desire of the PWD engineers, as outside experts, which is to dictate the terms of visibility and representation. Simultaneously, the form of the album as an object in exchange and its narrative suggesting the problems faced by the PWD engineers can be read as constitutive of a struggle over representation. Despite trying hard to maintain the modern-non modern/ expert-ignorant binary, the narrative form of the album with its text-photograph combinations reveals the anxiety of the PWD

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[359] Ibid., 42.

[360] Ibid., 36.

engineers unable to fully control the disorderliness of the villagers. The album does not show the PWD engineers as unscalable heroes, but as fallible and rather clueless people struggling to make sense of the ground conditions in the Khadar region, thus exposing their bias. The hand-written notes, shoddy corrections, spelling mistakes and pencil marks make Album 86 stand out in a sea of picture-perfect projections of the postcolonial state. The choice of the photographs is often off the mark, with the images displaying little congruence with the text. The photographs themselves are not sharp modernist compositions like Image 18, but obscure, ill-focussed frames which would go unnoticed if not for the text explaining them. However, these seemingly mundane and ordinary photographs become particularly significant when viewed within the broader 'visual economy'.[361] These photographs were assembled for an exchange, from the UP PWD to the Prime Minister's Office. The conscious framing choices embody specific messages and moral values[362] valuable to a higher authority (Nehru/PMO), who was possibly in charge of overseeing funds, promotions, and transfers.[363] The album represents a struggle over visual representation as it tries to portray the village and villagers in a certain stereotype while creating a self-reflexive image of the PWD on the ground.

Fragmented Optics of Postcolonial Development

From a Foucauldian perspective, highlighted through Scott's work, we have discussed how developmental reform projects, transnationally, carried an element of control and subjugation. At the same time, the nationalist underpinnings of such efforts were also highly relevant. Villages were reordered to appear not only modern but also Indian. Villages were an important part of the country's agrarian economy and the prime suppliers of food. As Prakash Kumar has pointed out, the postcolonial state, despite its valid criticisms, invested a considerable amount of state finance in welfarist reconstruction programs in the village.[364] S K Dey's Gandhian ideals on reconstruction, as argued even

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[361] Poole, *Vision, Race, and Modernity,* 6.

[362] Schwartz, 'We Make Our Tools and Our Tools Make Us', 42.

[363] Even if Nehru was not personally responsible for overseeing transfers and promotions, a closer association with the prime minister's office would be coveted by a senior officer, for the obvious perks it offers.

[364] The discourse on rural reconstruction in Kurukshetra and Yojana magazines is replete with evidence of self-reflexive criticisms by the state institutions. Kumar, 'A Big Machine Not Working Properly,' 1037.

by those who criticise its implementation at Nilokheri, were laudable.[365] The postcolonial nation-state's investment in the idea of village reconstruction as a nation-building exercise can be gauged by Nehru's words when he said, "The fundamental problem of India is not Delhi or Calcutta or Bombay but the villages of India… we want to urbanise the village, not take away the people from the villages to towns."[366] Ikuno Naka suggests that the village community in India has always been a patriotic image built on exaggerated notions of the village community. In the postcolonial period also, the village came to be perceived as a space for re-imagining the face of the nation.

Popular cinema of the period reduced the village to simplistic definitions of 'labour' and 'tradition'. For instance, villagers were seen as synonymous with the rural worker, their subjecthood marked by their utility in the rural economy. Such a construction offers "a powerful visual typology of rural India flattening the concrete and lived experience (of rural life) into a manageable sign".[367] The 'village as traditional' trope can be seen in popular Hindi films of the decade, the most popular of which was Mehboob Khan's 1957 blockbuster hit *Mother India*. This has been read as an iconic village film of the 1950s that does not just use the rural ambience as a backdrop for the story but glorifies the social order of the village. Protagonist Radha's personal story is set in the village, which is projected as the real India where 'Mother India' resides. In one song, the scene shows a map of India made of ploughed earth, dotted with faces of happy farmers, and swaying crops, reiterating Khan's perception of India as the mother who sustains her children.[368] Similar village films such as the 1953 film *Do Bigha Zameen* (Two Acres of Land) and *Naya Daur* (New Age) made in 1957[369], portrayed the villagers as naïve and innocent.[370] This portrayal displayed a deep anxiety[371] about backwardness while simultaneously seeing the village as a developmental site filled with possibilities.[372]

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[365] Ibid., 1041.

[366] Nehru quoted in Kalia, 'Modernism, Modernization and Postcolonial India,' 30.

[367] *Blaney and Shah, Photography in India*, 124.

[368] Bhatia, 'The Return of the Village'.

[369] While Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zamin* was a slightly more nuanced take on the power politics in the village, depicting the protagonist as forced to migrate to the cruel city in search of work; *Naya Daur* is a story of united villagers effectively fighting off modernization.

[370] A precursor to village visuals of the 1950s can be traced to the village visuals of Gandhi's nationalist movement centred on rural masses. See, Brown, *Gandhi's spinning wheel and the making of India*, 2010.

[371] A phrase borrowed from Cooper, 'Writing the History of Development,' 13.

[372] Sultan, 'Malcolm Darling and Developmentalism in Colonial Punjab,' 482.

Drawing from this context, reconstruction work in the villages of Ganga Khadar was an amalgam of Nehruvian ideas on making the village modern with Gandhian ideas of service for the nation. Despite their nationalist intentions, why did these programs fail to usher in developmental modernity in India?[373] In the final section of this chapter, I want to explore Album 86 to illuminate the optical gaps. As we will see, the new state failed to envision the villagers as co-producers of developmental modernity. Additionally, it failed to perceive the contradictions inherent in the village and thereby misapprehended the site it was due to engage with. Finally, I will briefly look at the alternate aesthetic forms used to critique the linearity of state vision, exposing the dissonances inherent in statist assumptions of linear progression.

Most critics blame the failure of developmental modernist projects on the misconceived assumption that once the expertise was available, the villagers would readily embrace it.[374] The top-down nature of the state mechanism did not account for the needs of the villagers[375] while formulating their vision. The failure of the developmental optics of the postcolonial state was marked by its inability *to see* the villager as an active participant capable of identifying his/her stakes in development. As we know the state in its paternalistic role, made choices for the citizens, resulting in a gross misapprehension of the actual needs of the villagers. Ranajit Guha has noted that the rural masses in nationalist historiography were articulated through the category of 'mobilisation'.[376] Popular anti-colonial movements like the Quit India were understood as a vertical mobilisation of rural masses under the leadership of mainstream nationalist leadership, mostly dominant caste leadership. According to Guha, the association of rural masses was more horizontal, across variables like kinship and territory, rather than vertical as interpreted by nationalist historiography. If we reconsider the photographs in Album 86 from Guha's point, we can see that the representation of the villagers here, does defy vertical conceptions.

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[373] Recent scholarship does not see this as a failure but as an eventual politicising of the sub-altern groups. Subir Sinha argues that irrespective of its implementation failures, development created possibilities for politicisation through new forms of community and offered a space for the citizens to engage with the state. *Sinha, '*Lineages of the Developmentalist State,' 61. While acknowledging the newer forms of politicisation that these developmental projects fostered, my dissertation is interested in exploring the failures of the developmental programs from the state's side, to understand the gaps and absences in state vision.

[374] Kumar, 'A Big Machine Not Working Properly,' 1046.

[375] The Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report of 1957 marked a shift in the public discourse of the CDP, when it criticised the experts for wielding too much decision-making power at the local level.

[376] Guha and Chatterjee, *The Small Voice of History*, 190.

There is a pattern in the depiction of problems in the Ganga Khadar. Most of the photographs, featuring problems or the pre-intervention stage, feature the villagers in the frame, while the majority of the photographs which represent changes brought by the engineers are empty sites without the presence of the villager. In a few photographs where the solution to the problem includes the figure of the villager, he/she is framed as a staffage, indicating scale, or a distant feature to fill up the emptiness in the frame. None of the photographs shows the villagers engaging with new developmental constructions – roads, drains, houses, bridges, or water systems.

Detail of Image 23

Detail of Image 26

Detail from Image 29 showing photograph 17

Detail of Image 24

Detail photograph 16 from Image 27

Images 23 and 26 represent pre-intervention ways of living. The villagers (and animals) have been photographed doing their everyday activities, using the space – houses and wells. Photographs showing improvements in the water system show empty concrete structures which the text explains as new tube well installations. Photograph 17 in Image 29 depicts two men standing under the shade of the new construction. However, their presence is a mere staffage as none of them is shown using the newly constructed tube wells. In a photograph that is supposed to show the improvements brought to the villager's life due to developmental intervention, these photographs do not show the villagers using any of the new constructions. Similar observations can be made of Image 24 showing empty house constructions, Image 27 showing the new well, Images 33 and 34 showing new roads, and again empty constructions without any villagers in the frame.

A relevant question to ask here is why are none of the developmental interventions photographed in use by the villagers? This observation is validated when we see that villagers are included in the frame in several pre-intervention photographs. For instance, Image 26 shows the existing water supply photographed with villagers and their cattle drinking from it, but the new well in Image 27 is represented without the villagers. Did the villagers not use the developmental interventions brought in by the PWD engineers? To bring back Guha's observation about representing rural masses through a logic of vertical mobilisation, the representation of the villagers in this album suggests resistance to that vertical logic. The villagers, as seen in this album, do not appear to be mobilised around the promise of development offered by the vertical leadership of the PWD engineers. Absence from the newly constructed interventionist landscape – new roads, new bridges, new wells, and new houses, could be seen as suggestive of their absence from the top-down visions of expert leadership in the rural areas. If we situate the before-after perspective within the optical binary of old (before developmental intervention) and new (after), the presence of the villagers in the before-photographs locates their existence in the pre-developmental modernist landscape of India, while constructing the developmental modernist aspirations of the new nation through their absence. Despite the claims of participatory development, the absence of villagers from the photographic frame of developmental intervention in this album reveals dissonances in the verticality of top-down optics of development. It interrupts the developmental modernist claims of spectacles like Bhakra, revealing the contestations and interruptions, through the 'problems' faced in and reconstructing rural areas of Ganga Khadar.

The second reason for the failure could also be a misperception of the village as a homogenous site overlooking the fundamental contradictions integral to the structure of the village. The imagination of the village was based on a gross misperception that resulted from a caste-blind assessment of the Hindu social order that was at the heart of the village ecosystem in India. PWD engineers failed to see what

was right in front of their eyes. When they saw houses built of mud and brick, they failed to see how certain communities inhabited such houses more than others. They failed to ask if those communities have access to other means of housing. When the PWD engineers encountered unsanitary conditions, they failed to ask who is responsible for cleaning the village. They failed to see that the dynamics of sanitation and cleanliness were linked to the caste hierarchy in the village. Dominant Caste houses did not handle/touch their own waste. It was the 'traditional' responsibility of the Untouchable community to clean the household waste of dominant caste groups.

Drawing on Ambedkar and Aloysius' writings, the failure of the developmental modernist reconstruction in the village was built on the nation-state's inability to *see* the divisiveness of the rural terrain. Shyama Charan Dube and Kusum Nair both have pointed out that the caste and gender variables increased the local resistance to several scientific, 'good' governmental ideas. For instance, Dube notes that the villagers refused to use the compost pit despite knowing its benefits. One of the main reasons for this was that upper-caste women would not be allowed to walk to the outskirts of the village, where the compost pit was constructed, carrying waste and cow dung, and men would not do it because this was seen as women's work.[377] In the late 1950s, Nair studied the villages of Western UP, where Hastinapur is located, and suggested that the compost pit proved useless because the higher castes don't handle garbage on their own and the lower caste women whose job it was to take the garbage could not be persuaded to take it outskirts of the village.[378]

The failure thus was an optical failure of a Caste-blind postcolonial state built on its inability to 'see' caste as an integral element around which village life was organised – who lived where, what work did people do (or were allowed to do), who could marry whom, who could eat with whom (leading to who could equally participate with whom). Structural ignorance of the caste system, reduced caste to a local problem, relegating its discussion to either poverty, discrimination, or atrocity (in the later decades) within a particular local area. Expert vision, as an extension of the postcolonial state's perspective, was afflicted by similar blindness to the structural tenacity of caste in the village. Album 86, in its attempt to reveal the problems of the expert engineer exposes this blindness of state vision. Developmental intervention in the Ganga Khadar reflects the gaps in State optics, channelised through engineers who chose to - *un-see* the divisive materiality of Indian village. I argue here that these gaps were not

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[377] Dube, *India's Changing Villages*.

[378] Nair, *Blossoms in the Dust; the Human Element in Indian Development*, 110–11.

incidental, but a political choice as there is ample evidence that the divisive reality of the village and the inadequacies of expert vision, were brought up much before the CDP was formulated.

The *Times of India* article published as early as 1931 by an anonymous writer, blames the upper classes in the cities for their ignorance about the conditions in neighbouring rural areas. It is stated that "the upper classes, perpetually surrounded by these villagers in the shape of servants and employees, do not appear to realise the part they play in the economic scheme of certain villages, nor why their servants left the land". Referring to the upper classes as "parlour experts" who have never been to a real village. This criticises their reform actions as pure theory or based on second-hand information. The writer calls out the bias inherent in the vision of these experts, who assume the villager to be "a pig-headed conservative, living a lazy life". The author then points out the real reason for the villagers exercising caution in embracing modern scientific knowledge. It is, the writer claims because the villagers are "intensely practical people" who refuse to take a step in the dark, adding that if they see that the outside expert knows what they are talking about, they will enthusiastically support the initiative.[379] Interestingly this writer, upturns the knowledge-power dynamics of the scientific state/ignorant and unmodern villager, constructing the villager as the rational actor, who refuses to act without evidence and projects the experts as the ignorant ones, who are operating in the space of a scopic gap, unable to accurately 'perceive' the village or the villager owing to a systemic blind-spot.[380] Such criticisms, raised as early as the 1930s, find their way into writings in the 1950s where claims to expertise are repeatedly questioned, and the systemic blindness of expert vision is repeatedly pointed out.[381]

An article in *Kurukshetra* magazine carried a story of Musahar's resistance to the reconstruction efforts in Nagwan near Patna. Musahars in Nagwan were a community of people considered untouchable and

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[379] From a Correspondent, 'Rural Uplift as the villager sees it.' *The Times of India*, July 11, 1936,16. Sourced from ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

[380] I want to add that the author here relies on a binary between the upper caste as city dwellings and the lower castes as village dwellings. While disagreeing with this divide, I am choosing to focus on the author's attempt to expose the inability of the experts to accurately perceive reality because of their structural privileges.

[381] Similar voices of criticism can be found in *Kurukshetra* and *Yojana* magazines. December 1953 issue of *Kurukshetra* carried a reader's criticism of the selection process for choosing 'outside' village experts. Another letter by a reader, in the April 1954 issue criticises the gender bias in selecting experts. The author, named as a "feminist" asks the editor, "will it be too much to expect more attention to women's participation…?".

were landless and poor. When the musahars asked to be paid wages for their labour on the house construction project, the Rotary Club of Nagwan, in charge of overseeing developmental work replied:

> *When your sons grow up and ask how you acquired these houses you will have to tell them, "Nagwan gave us the land; the Rotarians gave us the materials. Do you want to tell them that labour was also given to you?" If that is what you want, we will engage masons to complete the job. But would you not prefer to tell your sons, "These walls were raised with your own sweat, and it was our muscle which fixed these roofs in position?"*

The article reveals an attempt by the Musahars to mobilise and demand their rightful wages, through a delegation. However, the Club that acted as the representative of the developmental body refuses to address the question of labour and caste, instead chastising their demands with a narrative of dominant groups doing a favour by helping the untouchables. Though caste divisions presented an ideological resistance to the idea of a homogenous village with common interests, developmental agencies saw this as a localised problem, one that could be resolved by some volunteering work (borrowing from Gandhian thought).

The problem thus lies in the state's optics of development and modernisation formed through a caste-blind leadership of dominant caste groups that were formed during the nationalist struggle. If the colonial state treated the colony as its site to fashion modernity, the postcolonial state used the village as its playground for nationalist modernity. However, despite its proclamations, democratic possibilities of developmental modernity were not utilised. Development as progressive modernity could be accessible only when the endemic inequalities in Indian Brahmanical tradition were addressed. This required perceiving diversity within the homogeneity of the village, acknowledging the internal contradictions and injustice, and formulating a plan for change. However, the developmental ideals of the postcolonial state drew from Brahminic ideals of the nationalist movement that refuse to see the divisiveness inherent in Indian society, thereby diffusing any possibility of developmental modernity that could be premised on equality and justice. As noted in the introduction, the majority of postcolonial criticism in art historical scholarship of India sees the coloniser/colonised divide as the fundamental contradiction, ignoring the internal divisive within the ex-colony. My attempt here has been to show that reading the Indian structural reality through the ontological presence of caste, could be one way of addressing the nuances of the postcolonial experience.

As we know by now, the critique was present in the very conception of the CDP and its allied ideas of rural reconstruction. These critical attitudes also created new aesthetic forms that opposed the linear

optics of the state. The two cartoons below can be seen as attempts to create an aesthetic of static-ness, recalling the concept of a suspended future discussed earlier.

Image 35: RK Laxman, 'Carrying It Over',' cartoon, *Yojana*, March 1957, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, New Delhi. Accessed from the Gokhale Institute Library, Pune.

R K Laxman's cartoon satirises the futuristic promises of the nation-state. [382] Divided into four panes, Image 35 shows futile attempts of the Plan's promise to 'reach' prosperity. While the four panels show the same premise – three characters with a sign pointing to prosperity outside the frame, Laxman has questioned the state optics of linearity and progress. Sushmita Chatterjee's analysis of Laxman's work over the years suggested that his cartoons point out contradictions, guarding against any closure. Instead, through a combination of text and image, Laxman deftly opens-up possibilities of satirical

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[382] S Chatterjee, 'Cartooning Democracy', 303-306; Laxman, 'Freedom to cartoon, freedom to speak', 68. Rewins, 'Sociopolitical Reading of RK Laxman's Common Man',44.

perception, illuminating the capacity to be otherwise.[383] This cartoon can be seen for its ability to illuminate a critical visual aesthetic by inverting the developmental modernist optics of linearity as discussed in chapter one. Instead of a movement forward, the cartoon formulates a critique through a static circularity. Even though the sign points to prosperity outside the frame, the viewer's gaze is not directed out of the frame. Rather, the cartoon enforces a static-circular vision through repetition of similar motifs in no particular order– pulling, pushing, cajoling, carrying and repeat, thus exposing the lack of any forward movement. In the background of a prosperity that is inaccessible to the present, the postcolonial state's efforts are going round and round in circles, countering the promise of forwarding movement and linearity with a circularity built on the absence of a forward movement.

His cartoons reveal an eye for absurdity in democracy, exposing the gap between plans and reality. Image 35 reflects this disconnect between the promises of the Five-Year Plans (village reconstruction being a part of it) and the unchanging reality on the ground. Laxman's circular loop has parallels in other works too. For instance, Image 36 explores the circular form to frame a satire on the bureaucratic mechanism of the postcolonial nation-state. In this cartoon, the protagonist is looking for someone, allegorical of looking for development-led progress. However, despite moving from one desk to another in search of the right person, the protagonist comes back to the first desk, indicating a futile movement that leads nowhere. This static-ness based on the circular form that we have seen in both the cartoons is similar to the aesthetic of static circularity ascribed to diverse indigenous groups by the state, as we have discussed in chapter one. However, the circular form controverts the state optic and is instead used by the cartoonists to highlight the state's static-ness, drawing up a critique of its developmental modernist claims.

Laxman's cartoons are an attempt to bring out the inherent contradictions through "controlled and credible exaggerations".[384] This cartoon can be seen for its congruence with Ambedkar's critique of the Indian village. For Ambedkar, the village was a dead site, incapable of reforming itself in ways that Gandhi or Nehru hoped for. The reason for this static nature of the village was linked to the graded nature of the caste in the Hindu social order, which made it structurally resilient to democratic reform. Development programs of the postcolonial state with its Brahmanical lens were unable to see this static nature of the village. Therefore, despite all the claims for movement (developmental work), they were not successful in actually moving (ushering a postcolonial modernity). As we have discussed in chapter one, the dialectic of linearity and circularity was a preferred aesthetic node in the ocular expanse of the

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[383] Chatterjee, 'Cartooning Democracy', 306.

[384] Laxman, *Collected Writings*, 334.

developmental modernist state. A counter to this can be seen in these critiques (Images 35-36) that used the circular form to expose the fictitious claims of linearity.
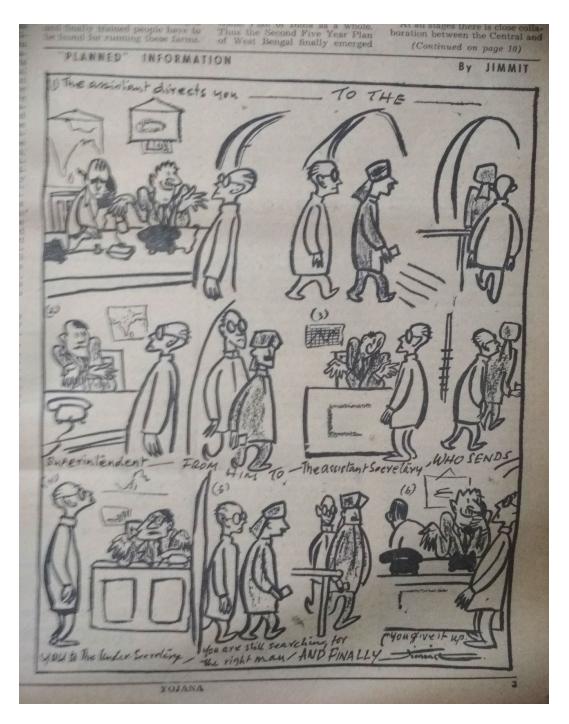
Image 36: Jimmit, 'Planned Information', cartoon, *Yojana*, March 1957, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcast, New Delhi. Accessed from the Gokhale Institute Library, Pune.

In conclusion, while several albums were commonly circulated in the bureaucratic networks, Album 86 reveals multiple ambiguities and negotiations of its time. It betrays the propagandist tone of its era and depicts the optical fissures in the processes of expert reform. All the more because it is a low-key artefact. The challenges, struggles and inadequacies of the engineer's vision are laid bare, as they try to fulfil the Nehruvian dream on the ground. These engineers themselves were embroiled in a systemic hierarchy of experts where they were required to demonstrate changes to sustain their relevance in the official channels while battling mistrust from the villagers. The album as an object in exchange, "performs the images in certain ways"[385] allowing the contemporary reader to get an intimate view of how the state sees. The social relations and optical frames (and absences) that generated its production and exchange, confer additional meaning to the photographs and sequencing of the album, further extending the photographic attributes of the images. If photography is seen as a medium for its power to make visible, as an "index and agent of publicness",[386] then it can also be investigated for what it makes invisible, and what it hides from the public eye. The album, as we have discussed, reveals a systemic blind spot toward perceiving caste. It also reveals an absence of the villager in the developmental optics of the postcolonial state. Failure of the developmental modernist promise was thus an optical failure as much as a failure at the ideological and implementation level. In the next chapter, we will take the example of the spectacular Bhakra Dam as a sign of developmental modernity and delve deeper into the silences and absences it generates.

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[385] Edwards and Hart, *Photographs Objects Histories*, 11.

[386] Frosh, 'The Public Eye and the Citizen-Voyeur'.

3. De-monumentalising the Bhakra-Nangal Dam: Looking for the Hidden, Silenced and Replaced Optics of Development

A recurrent theme in my dissertation is the intersection of the photographic medium with the developmental modernist envisioning of India after independence. This chapter will unpack the gigantic photographic archive of the Bhakra Nangal Dam as a way to deconstruct the developmental vision of the postcolonial state. The constructed monumentality of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam includes a variety of materials such as photographs from official government publications, personal collections, documentary stills, and magazine photographs, which reveal the interspersed and diffused nature of the archive. According to Ann Brysbaert, the construction and consumption of large monuments are associated with socio-economic and political changes that a society undergoes, offering a useful frame to investigate the associated societies.[387] Building on this suggestion, this chapter will examine the post-colonial state through its attempt to monumentalise large-scale developmental changes such as the Bhakra Nangal Dam in the post-1947 period.

Dam building generated a significant developmental optic for the new government and therefore, the government invested a considerable effort in curating the visual aesthetic of dams. Darcy Grigsby has written about the visual experience that can be created using a monumental scale. The Bhakra-Nangal Dam, with intense discussions on its height, a circulation of wide landscape photographs that capture its mammoth width and strength against the flowing river waters, and rules of censorship around seeing and photographing the dam; together can be seen as an effort to curate a visual experience of the monumentality of the dam. And yet, as Grigsby has shown, the monumentality of man-made structures can be found in the human labour – physical, intellectual, logistical, and managerial, that went into the construction of this monumental image.[388] Building on Grigsby's method, this chapter finds inspiration in understanding the monumental structure of Bhakra Dam by exploring the 'monumental' human costs of this construction, focussing on those who were displaced and those who risked their lives to work in difficult mountainous terrain. I am operating on the assumption that the ambiguities and contradictions that underlay the postcolonial state ideology were optically encoded within those very sites of developmental display and the evidence of silences and omissions can be found within those very narratives that seek to silence. Throughout the chapter, I will be exploring the Dam

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[387] Brysbaert et al., *Constructing Monuments, Perceiving Monumentality*, 21.

[388] Grigsby, *Colossal-Engineering Modernity*.

photographs through a subaltern lens to explore what is left out of this state-curated frame, what is hidden, silenced, and replaced, in effect de-monumentalising the Bhakra-Nangal Dam.

In the previous chapter, we explored 'how do the government engineers see' using one singular artefact – Album 86. In this chapter, we will be investigating 'how does the technocratic state see' through its mammoth official archive, created by an abstract and contested network of multiple state agents. This includes official photographs of the Bhakra Dam from state archives discussed in the Introduction, some photographs taken by me as a part of ethnographic fieldwork in the region, and several photographs from official publications on the Dam such as the Commemorative Volume. In the later part of the chapter, I will be discussing photographs reproduced by a local publisher in Nangal showing the displacement caused by the Dam, gathered during a field visit to Nangal in 2019. These photographs and other oral and textual material from my fieldwork inform my discussion on what is missing and left out of the official Dam archive.

The role of the state in archiving and distributing images meant that the bureaucratic-clerical aspects often took precedence over the image aesthetics. In his 1986 essay 'The Body and the Archive', Allan Sekula notes:

> the emergence of a truth apparatus that cannot be adequately reduced to the optical model provided by the camera. The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of "intelligence". This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artefact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.[389]

If the filing cabinet is the model of the archive, Sekula encourages us to find connections between the archival mode of photography and the emergence of photographic modernism[390]. Can we write about the histories of postcolonial photography practices in India, that explore modernism beyond discussions on shapes, lines, and formal geometries? To what degree did the model of the archive with its lineages in the colonial punitive and exploitative systems, integrate photography with the emergence of developmental modernism in postcolonial India? These questions and Sekula's metaphor of the filing cabinet will inform the photographic analysis in this chapter.[391]

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[389] Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive,' 16.

[390] Ibid, 58.

[391] On the politics of choice as integral to the formation of an archive, see, Schwartz, 'Records of Simple Truth and Precision'; Schwartz, 'Having New Eyes'.

Besides the filing cabinet of the official archives, I have reproduced several photographs from an official publication titled the 'Commemorative Volume'. It was first published in 1963 on the inauguration of the Dam (and then another copy with some repeat and some new information was published on its silver jubilee called the *Silver Jubilee Bulletin*). These publications, a mix of an illustrative magazine and a book with descriptive articles and informative essays had a single thematic focus and a clear intention of recording the official narrative of the Dam for its employees and other members of the government. It is hard to know the possible sites where these publications were circulated. Given the national importance of the Dam, my guess is that copies of it must have been sent to several central and state libraries, official departments, officers-in-charge of the Dam and allied departments. The inclusion of photography in these publications was meant to memorialise, which can be understood by David Bate's use of the phrase 'meta-archive'. Drawing on Jacques Le Goff, Bate argues that photography's value lies in its ability to industrialise visual memory.

He writes:

> *The photographic image is not just another memory device, merely an apparatus of the police or a bureaucratic gaze, but a machine for what I would call a meta-archive. The photograph offers itself as a meta-form, which can incorporate and absorb many other already existing visual memory devices within photographic re-presentation.*[392]

Photographs are not just stored in the archive, but they themselves are an archive, one that stores and recalls existing visual memory devices. The photographs used in publications meant to 'commemorate' the Dam, function in this complex of archive and memory, which we will explore through the analysis in this chapter.

The chapter proceeds in two parts: the first part explores the state-curated vision of the Bhakra Dam through a mammoth government archive and the second part, explores photographic material that can potentially challenge the harmony of the state archive, de-monumentalising the grand developmental promises made. In this chapter, I argue that what is occluded and omitted, collectively reveals postcolonial India's developmental vision as much as what is officially shown.

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[392] Bate, 'The Memory of Photography'.
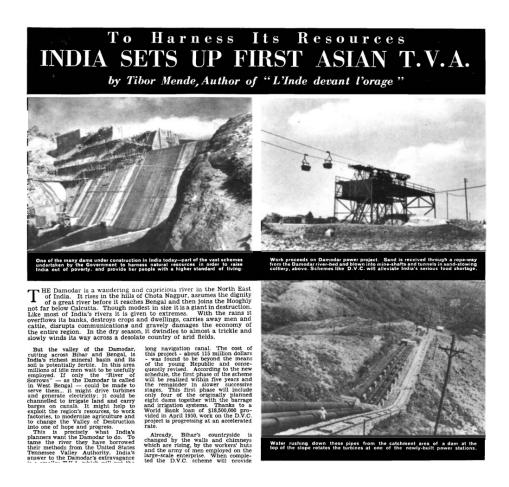
Image 37: Tibor Mende, 'India Sets Up First Asian TVA', three photographs, *The UNESCO courier*, May 1951.

In May 1951, the *UNESCO Courier* carried a special issue on South Asia which carried an article on the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC)[393] in India. The photograph on the top left corner is an image of the concrete wall, as the caption informs, 'one of the many' damming projects (Image 37) envisaged by the Government of India to harness natural resources and 'raise India out of poverty'. The concrete

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[393] The Damodar Flood Enquiry Committee suggested the creation of an authority, similar to the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the USA, to oversee the construction of dams and storage reservoirs with a total capacity of 1.5 million acres ft. and to create multipurpose development in the valley area of river Damodar in eastern India. The Damodar Valley Corporation Act (Act No. XIV of 1948) was passed to build the Damodar Valley Corporation (DVC). This information is from the official website accessible athttps://www.dvc.gov.in/dvcwebsite_new1/overview/

dam wall became an optical sign of the numerous developmental actions undertaken by the postcolonial state in India during the 1950s.

In the years after independence, postcolonial state emerged as an active intervenor in public processes with a strong futuristic mandate to 'develop'. The state's approach toward development was supposed to be scientific[394] and planned,[395] as laid down by the experts of the Planning Commission.[396] Abstract ideals such as 'progress' and 'development' took concrete visual form through images of big dams and massive steel plants, workshops inside locomotive factories, farmers using new pumps depicting agriculture development and several generic images of women in salwar kameez[397] handling test tubes,[398] engineers supervising massive construction projects, and workers lifting rock and concrete on vast industrial landscapes. Big dams, in particular, became a symbol of the techno-economic power of the emerging nation-state's ability to rearrange its natural and social environment.[399] The image of the concrete dam wall blocking the flow of water thus carried an ideological function. In effect, this image became central to the postcolonial state (ruled by the Indian National Congress during that period), legitimising itself as the rightful and moral successor of the British in India.

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[394] There is growing scholarship on science and its role in postcolonial state-making. Deepak Kumar notes a 'dis-unity' of elite purpose in the scientific impetus of postcolonial developmental imagination. See D Kumar, 'Reconstructing India'. David Arnold writes about the centrality of Nehru's vision in framing science as a reformist exercise of the state. The Nehruvian state presented science as a program of delivery committed to redressing 'backwardness', making science answerable to the state and in service of the people. Arnold, 'Nehruvian Science and Postcolonial India'. On postcolonial science and its contradictions, see Abraham, 'Landscape and Postcolonial Science'; Abraham, 'Postcolonial Science, Big Science'; Abraham, *The Making of the Indian Atomic Bomb: Science, Secrecy and the Postcolonial State*; Abraham, 'Science and Power in the Postcolonial State'. Also, Prakash, *Another Reason*. For an overview of the debates, Seth, 'Putting Knowledge in Its Place'., For a feminist reading, *Harding, Science and Social Inequality.* On the cultural discourse on scientific temper, Raza, 'Scientific Temper and Cultural Authority of Science in India'.

[395] Between 1947-1960, Indian political leadership romantically engaged with the idea of developmental 'Planning' and hoped to institutionalise it, but the 1956 foreign exchange crisis derailed the project of development and shifted it to pragmatic economic management pursued by official agencies" thus failed to establish strong foundations of Planning in India. For more on institutionalising of planning, see M Kudaisya, '"A Mighty Adventure"'.

[396] P C Mahalanobis and Meghnad Saha were two prime members, among many others who pushed for scientific and planned development. Saha, 'Science in Social and International Planning, with Special Reference to India'; Mahalanobis, 'Science and National Planning'.

[397] A traditional north Indian dress for women.

[398] Roy, *Beyond Belief*, 47.

[399] World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development*.

During the time of its construction, the Bhakra-Nangal Dam (Bhakra Dam or the Dam, from now on) was one of the biggest concrete-gravity dams in the world, and one of the largest development projects in India.[400] Among all the other dams, the Bhakra Dam was a spectacular exhibition of the impulse to alter the existing nation and make a new India.[401] This Dam was pictured as a visual corollary to nation-building and became a powerful rhetorical trope for showing the nation's progress.[402] At the heart of its success, Bhakra Dam was hailed as "a virtuoso engineering performance"[403]. Built on a narrow gorge of Sutlej River in the Himalayan state of Himachal Pradesh,[404] the first phase of construction[405] started in 1948 with two fifty-foot diameter diversion tunnels, one on either side of the gorge, for carrying the river water. This was completed in 1953. After this, the two coffer dams were built, one upstream and the other downstream to enclose the operation area in the riverbed. This enclosed area was then drained, and foundation excavation began, which continued until the end of 1955 when a bed-rock was created. Around the same time, a concrete-making plant was also completed in line with this schedule. On 17th November 1955, the then prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru put the first bucket of concrete in the dry riverbed foundation and the actual construction of the Bhakra Dam began.[406] Construction of the Dam and the ensuing difficulties in construction were of national interest. Images of heavy construction work in difficult terrain were regularly circulated.

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[400] The first decade after 1947 saw the emergence of four major damming projects – Bhakra Nangal Dam, Hirakud Dam, Damodar Valley Project, and Tungabhadra Canal Project; In addition, public money was invested in big steel and iron ore plants at Bhilai and Rourkela in eastern India.

[401] For a general overview, Rangachari, *The Bhakra-Nangal Project*. For a critical view of the Bhakra Project, Dharmadhikary, *Unravelling Bhakra*.

[402] For general reading on the influence of positivist ideas like 'progress' on the politics of dam building in India, D'Souza, 'Framing India's Hydraulic Crises'.

[403] Khilnani, *The Idea of India*. 62.

[404] The Dam submerged large territories of Bilaspur, a colonial princely state, ceded to India in 1948 and formally integrated with Himachal Pradesh in 1954.The 2011 Supreme Court verdict noted that the construction of Bhakra Dam had brought a lot of benefits to the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Chandigarh, but also resulted in the submergence of 27,869 acres of land in Himachal which meant the loss of cultivated and uncultivated land to a total extent of 1.03 lakh acres that needed to be compensated by neighbouring states. For reference, Press Trust of India, "SC [Supreme Court] urges Auditor General over the settlement of interstate dispute over Bhakra Beas Projects," *Hindustan Times*, Oct 2, 2017.

[405] To avoid confusion, I refer to the Bhakra Dam with a Capital D and the rest of the dams, or any general reference to dams with a small d.

[406] See, 'Prologue', in *Bhakra Dam and Power Plant Commemorative Volume* (henceforth, the *Commemorative Volume*) published by the Bhakra Beas Management Board (BBMB) for its inauguration on 22nd October 1963.

Before we explore circulated images of the Bhakra Dam that became central to the ocular map of developmentalism in India, let us briefly look at the general history of modern dams and situate it in the broader postcolonial context. Timothy Mitchell historically traces modern damming projects to the Aswan Low dam in Egypt in 1898-1902,[407] where river flows were directed by heaps of concrete.[408] The completion of the Aswan Low dam in 1902 was celebrated by the British as a great engineering feat and a triumph over forces of nature. According to Travis Cook, a similar narrative was repeated in the mid-twentieth century as the proposals for the Aswan High dam were discussed. The Aswan High dam (later called the Aswan dam) was visualised as a key objective of the new Egyptian government under Gamal Abdul Nasser in the aftermath of the 1952 Egyptian revolution. The dam was seen as pivotal to Egypt's future as a planned industrialised nation.[409] One might say that the dam became a pivotal image of state-led developmentalism across several nations in the world. One of the most prominent examples of this can be seen in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) project which was a part of Roosevelt's New Deal at a time when the United States was at the peak of its state-capitalist moment.[410] Another example is the construction of the White Sea Canal under the Stalinist government which has been the subject of photographic records by Rodchenko who as an artist-in-residence was present for two years on the project site.

A similar visual metaphor operated in India as several rivers were dammed in the initial decade after 1947[411]. In the fifty years after Independence, building dams came to be equated with nation-building. In Arundhati Roy's words:

> *Not only did [Nehru's foot-soldiers] build new dams and new irrigation systems, but they also took control of small, traditional systems that had been managed by village communities for thousands of years and allowed them to atrophy. To compensate the loss, the Government*

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[407] For a discussion on Egypt's Aswan dam as one of the major modern constructions of the twentieth century, Fahim, *Dams, People and Development*.

[408] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

[409] T Cook, 'Engineering Modernity'.

[410] In India, the DVA discussed in Image 1 draws ocular references to the TVA. For a discussion on the visual commonalities between the projection of the DVA and the TVA, see Gupta, 'Modernism's Ocular Economies and Laconic Discontents in the Era of Nehruvian Technocracy'.

[411] There exists a huge scholarship dissecting the role of big dams in India's development history. For a critical enquiry into the politics of dams and development, see D'Souza, *The Narmada Dammed*. For a global perspective on balancing big dams with human welfare to eradicate poverty and preserve the environment, Biswas and Tortajada, 'Development and Large Dams'. For discussion on a middle way forward between seeing dams as symbols of progress and dams as inherently flawed, Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams*.

built more and more dams. India now boasts of being the third largest dam builder in the world. According to the Central Water Commission, we have three thousand six hundred dams that qualify as Big Dams, three thousand three hundred of them built after Independence. One thousand more are under construction.[412]

Sunil Khilnani argues that for the workers who built dams, the reasons were simple - to make a living. But for those who imagined them into existence, big dams along with steel and power plants built "an embodied vision of modernity to which India had committed itself". These were spectacles "upon which the nation watched expectantly as the image of the future was projected" This image promised that India would become "an industrial giant".[413] What is critical to note here is the strong futuristic appeal of these developmental projects. The dam became one way of directing people's attention away from the present state of adversity to a promise of the future. The word 'development' gained currency in this context. 'Developing'(v) as a process transformed itself into 'Development'(n) - a formidable goal to be achieved, a vision for the future of ex-colonised nations.

Mitchell writes that in the period after 1947-48, "…Governing people through their future became a device for managing populations in the formally colonized world".[414] As Mitchell says, development became a "novel way of bringing the future into government"[415] and into governance. In the mid-twentieth century, as the process of decolonisation began in several parts of Asia and Africa, futuristic themes of progress and development became prominent in their political discourse.[416] Reinhart Koselleck's book on historical time argues that the emergence of modernity rearranges historical time and relocates the past and the future in relation to each other.[417] Itty Abraham calls it the representation of the spatial present that came as a temporal past.[418] The promise of modernity becomes intimately tied to 'freedom, progress and infinite human improvement',[419] which can be seen as a continual urge for

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[412] And yet, Arundhati Roy notes that one-fifth of our population–200 million people does not have safe drinking water and two-thirds– 600 million– lacks basic sanitation. A Roy, 'The Greater Common Good'.

[413] Khilnani, *The Idea of India*. 62.

[414] Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.

[415] Ibid.

[416] The discourse on progress sees a revival in the 1990s when the Indian economy is officially privatised. For more reference on how progress has been a keyword in the process of displacement and disenfranchisement of people in India, Roy, *Listening to Grasshoppers*.

[417] Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

[418] Abraham, 'Landscape and Postcolonial Science', 164-65.

[419] Carr, 'Review of "Future Past"'.

development rooted in a utopian future. We have previously discussed Sankaran Krishna's writing on the "logic of deference" marks the state formation practices in postcolonial nations.[420] The nation remains suspended in a state of 'becoming' which is a dynamic, future-oriented, ever-unfolding process possible only through the presence of the postcolonial state marking its distinction from the colonial state. As Krishna points out, the metaphor of nations as a journey, perpetually in the making but never quite reaching their goal is central to nationalism everywhere.[421] This aspect has been discussed in the previous chapter when we briefly studied the use of the circular form that was satirically employed to highlight the static-ness of postcolonial vision, its inability to move forward and being stuck in the constant loop of 'becoming' developed. In a Foucauldian reading, James Fergusson explored developmental interventionist work as an apparatus that is built on the futuristic promise of modernity. The state draws on this promise of the future to create an endless desire for development among its subjects. In doing so, the postcolonial state employs the logic of endless deterrence to an unseen future as a way of establishing itself as the true representative of the identity and interests of the sovereign people.

Besides other kinds of developmental work (like the rural development project discussed in chapter two), the construction of big dams accomplished through remarkable engineering talent emerged as one of the most prominent symbols of a future that could be authored only by the new state.[422] A popular song from the Bollywood film *Hum Hindustani* (1961) includes the famous lyrics, "*Chodo Kal Ki Baatein, Kal Ki Baat Purani, Naye Daur mein likhenge milkar nayi kahani Hum Hindustani / Leave behind old stories, yesterday is our past, we write a new story for our new time, we Indians*". The extremely popular song extolled the people to leave behind old stories and look forward to building a new future together. In a particularly telling phrase, the song exclaims, "*abhi palatna hai rukh kitne dariyaon ka, kitne parvat rahon se hai aaj hatane/ we need to change the course of many rivers, move many mountains from our way [towards the future]*". This lyric is visualised in the film with three images – the first is a shot of the river water flowing fiercely through the mountains, the second is an explosion of rock, presumably a mountain that is to be moved to make the dam, and the third depicts several workers on the dam construction site.

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[420] Krishna, *Postcolonial Insecurities: India, Sri Lanka, and the Question of Nationhood*, 15:17.

[421] Ibid.

[422] On dams in the modernist aspirations of the Global South, and the costs paid in terms of environment and social justice, Baghel, 'Discussing Large Dams in Asia After the World Commission on Dams: Is a Political Ecology Approach the Way Forward?'.

As postcolonial India embraced centralised economic planning through centralised ownership of resources, big dam projects also became one way to achieve state control. According to Sukhamoy Chakravarty, centralised Planning allowed state ownership of the means of production, thus allowing a wider sphere for the operative activities of the state.[423] Partha Chatterjee similarly argues that 'Planning' emerged as a state modality to determine the allocation of productive resources within a nation,[424] allowing the postcolonial nation-state to claim legitimacy as a single will and consciousness of the new nation pursuing certain developmental tasks in the interest of the new nation. Planning, for Chatterjee, emerges as an instrument through which the state exercises capitalist control while projecting the state as the representation of a Gramscian 'national-popular' collective will. The interventionist nation-state exercises control over the domain of production as the "mobilizer and manager of investible 'national' resources".[425] These resources include rivers, mines, seas, forests and more. In the process, the nation-state also becomes the manager of communities whose lives are entwined with these national natural resources. Planning was thus not only an instrument used by the emerging nation-state to establish itself but also an ideological preference[426] of the state to decide the terms of its establishment. The technical discipline of Planning must be seen for its role as an instrument of power and ideology.[427]

As a public construction made possible through the displacement of local people from their land, a dam functions as a metaphorical as well as a literal sign of the state's domination of the land. It is a powerful public metaphor in defence of industrial modernity, the 'taming' of nature for the 'benefit' of humanity.[428] The construction of dams and the difficulties faced,[429] is projected as an allegory for a nation to meet

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[423] Chakravarty, 'Development Planning'.

[424] It is important to note here that planning allowed the state to act outside the purview of the immediate political processes in a representative democracy. Planning was not an issue debated within the parliament, but the decision of a committee of experts outside the political process. For more, Chatterjee, 'Development Planning and the Indian State'.

[425] Ibid.

[426] Ibid.

[427] Chatterjee, Development planning and the Indian state, 120-5.

[428] This is a recurring narrative throughout the *Commemorative Volume* on the Bhakra Dam and Power Plant and the Brochure on Bhakra Dam and Power Plant.

[429] There are stories of technical difficulties faced by engineers. One specific case of the water flooding the construction site. The Navy was called for help to fix the loopholes and the construction continued thereafter. Besides this, several workmen died during the construction of the dam, who were later officially labelled as the "martyrs" in the cause of building the Dam. A sculpture titled martyrs, representing them exists at the Nehru Centre exhibition at the Bhakra Dam site. This aspect will be discussed in detail later in the chapter.

its predestined future overcoming hurdles along the way. Building on the politics of 'seeing' in postcolonial India, the Bhakra Dam was yet another attempt to create a state-led optic. This can be seen in Nehru's appointment of Le Corbusier as the architectural advisor of the Bhakra Dam, whose job was to plan 'how the Dam should look'. Atreyee Gupta has studied Corbusier's sketches on the Dam to argue that even though Corbusier's (and Nehru's) vision was not accomplished, the plan was to produce the image of a 'secular infrastructure' through the Bhakra Dam.[430] My intention, however, is to see his appointment as a symbolic presence of a 'conscious modern aesthetic' on the Dam. Corbusier was famous for his modern 'optic' and as Phillips notes, "a champion of self-sufficient beauty of geometric forms".[431] His involvement in the Dam project can be seen as an attempt by the Nehruvian administration to consciously engage in constructing a postcolonial aesthetic that was 'modern', and 'aesthetic' by being geometric and mechanical. This intention of curating a 'look' that makes the modern appear aesthetically attractive, can be seen in parallel with our discussion on the 'new vision' of the photography clubs in chapter one and the optics of rural development where the expert vision focuses on how the village should 'look'.

In agreement with Gupta's argument for the centrality of vision in the developmental imagination of the 1950s, I want to suggest that this 'optic' was central not just to the imagination of developing India, but to the logistical making of postcolonial development projects. For instance, the governing body of the Dam, the Bhakra Control Board (BCB) included a separate publication department dedicated to the production, sourcing, assimilation and finally publication and distribution of the material around the Dam. The BCB also appointed a photographer, who was a regular full-time employee entrusted with the task of taking pictures of the Dam and contributing to the publications. Although it is difficult to ascertain the exact year in which the post of the photographer was officially instituted in the Dam office, we find the mention of the first official photographer H S Mathur in the *Commemorative Volume* published in 1963, suggesting that his presence and his photography, were integral to the project from the initial phases. One can assume from the officially commissioned images in the BCB archive taken by Mathur that photographing the Dam 'in making' was one of his core job responsibilities. The photographs of the Dam in construction were crucial to the postcolonial state's narrative of development. A development that was active in anticipation, not just in actual realisation.

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[430] Gupta, 'Modernism's Ocular Economies and Laconic Discontents in the Era of Nehruvian Technocracy'.

[431] Phillips, 'Resurrecting Vision', 19.

BCB was set up by the Central Government to oversee the construction of the Dam. After its completion, the BBMB (Bhakra Beas Management Board) took over the management of operations on the site with effect from October 01, 1967. This organisation functions through a gigantic bureaucratic setup. Photographs taken by H S Mathur, and the later photographers appointed by the Board,[432] along with other textual and statistical material together constitute the huge BBMB archive. This archive is temporally dispersed through different libraries, irrigation and power centres in India. However, a majority of information remains at the Nangal on-site library and the BBMB office in Chandigarh. The visual material within this archive is as gigantic and interspersed, consisting of photographs, maps, diagrams, 3-D engineering models, scientific illustrations, graphs, data tables, and more.[433] Knowledge of such a mixed sort is often difficult to process, conflicting in what it communicates, and can only be organised and accessed through bureaucratic means.[434] In this case, the publication department manages the material on the Dam. The department is also responsible for distributing copies of photographs of the Dam to Central government institutions such as the National Archives and the Photos Division in New Delhi. Their collection is mostly undated and anonymous, making it difficult to ascertain the exact time period when the photograph was taken and by whom. However, in my interviews with the staff at the BBMB in 2019, I was told that most of the earlier photographs of the Dam are possibly taken by H S Mathur.

Besides the production and circulation of the material, the BBMB is known for its pronounced censorship and regulation of vision concerning the Dam photographs. While the prototype image of the Dam wall is found across different sites of the archive in several variations, there is strict regulation on researchers accessing photographs of the internal workshops and control rooms for reasons of national security. Cross and Peck remind us to see the archive as a site from which the 'narrative of censorship' is formulated.[435] What can be seen, what must be seen and what must be omitted – are prominent concerns for the bureaucratic machinery in charge of an archive. From the 1962 war with China to the

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[432] After HS Mathur, who worked with the Dam for about 20 years, the next appointee was Mr Duggal, who worked for a short time, before handing over the charge to Jagdish Kumar, who is the official photographer now. This information is based on an interview with Kumar on January 23, 2019, at the BBMB office in Chandigarh.

[433] Besides the visual material, there exists huge textual documentation, booklets, official reports, scientific studies, and government files related to the Dam, found in several different geographic regions across India. Major archival centres are Delhi, Chandigarh and Nangal; but there is material on the Bhakra Dam at other dam sites and reference libraries all across India.

[434] As suggested in Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive'.

[435] Cross and Peck, 'Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory', 129.

ongoing political tensions with Pakistan,[436] there have been several excuses for the selective disclosure of the Bhakra Dam to the public eyes. While collecting visual material on the Dam in the states of Punjab and Haryana, I interviewed the local people about how they perceived the Dam and the ongoing security concerns around it. While several stories, anecdotes and rumours flew around, one story came up more often than others. A security threat to Bhakra was detected a few years ago when one man was caught with a 'drawing/map' (words used interchangeably by people) of the Dam. It is interesting to notice that the locals I interviewed did not know whether the map was a detailed outline of the interior of the Dam or just a simple sketch of the external structure. However, it is the presence of this drawing which acts as a tool to intensify and justify the security concerns around the Dam. This explains why a majority of photographic material on the Bhakra Dam remains classified information even after six decades, indicating the continued efforts of the state to regulate historical vision and the potential of the photographic medium to show more than what the state wants to reveal.

The Dam Prototype: Exploring the Official Vision

In postcolonial India, the transition years from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, saw a booming agrarian crisis, a recurring flood and famine situation, and a bloody and chaotic partition that brought in a severe refugee resettlement issue. In such a scenario, the anticipation of a developed future was sold as the only hope from the tumultuous present. In this scenario, the picture of a dam site that broke through mighty rivers, where hundreds of workers toiled towards making the future of independent India, became a powerful ideological sign. The visuals of the Bhakra Dam in construction emerged as one of the prime spectacles of developing India. Interestingly, the state machinery was aware of the importance of visualising this development to the voting public. Besides the official appointment of photographers and the work of the publication department, Bhakra Dam was also publicized through public exhibitions. A functional model of the Bhakra Dam was first exhibited at Pragati Maidan in Delhi in November 1955 when the project was in its initial stages (See Image 38). GP Malhotra, who was then posted as the design engineer in the Bhakra Dam Designs Directorate, remembers Nehru's keen interest in displaying a futuristic working model of the Dam. According to Malhotra's account, Nehru visited the model site twice and gave specific suggestions that he would like the people to see a model of the Dam with running water. It is interesting to note that the time of the construction of the Dam (1947-1963) directly correlates with the tenure of Nehru's prime ministership (1947-1964). During the thirteen

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[436] Bhakra Nangal Dam has been built on river Sutlej which is connected by water to Pakistan. For a general discussion on the hydro-politics in Pakistan, Khalid and Begum, 'Hydro Politics in Pakistan'.

years of its construction, Prime Minister Nehru famously paid thirteen publicised visits to the Dam. It is also known that Nehru took a personal interest in the progress of the construction, allowing Dam superintendent Harvey Slocum, personal access to him. This is said to have been a result. of Bhakra's unique place in India's (and Nehru's) postcolonial vision. In a way, the Bhakra Dam stood as a portrait of the Nehruvian regime in making. His specific interest in showing how the Dam will materialise in the future (in the exhibition) suggests that the Dam was not just constructed at Bhakra, but also visualised for the rest of the country as a living image of the future[437] representing a self-reliant postcolonial nation. The image of Bhakra thus became a metonym to see the futuristic vision of the Nehruvian state itself.

Image 38: Nehru observing the Bhakra Dam model at Exhibition in Delhi in 1955, photograph in the *Golden Jubilee Issue*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

James Osborne has written about the forward-looking relationship of monuments,[438] suggesting that the materiality of a monument engenders a new set of relationships, provoking reactions independent of their biographies.[439] Borrowing from Osborne's work, I want to highlight this element of forward-

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[437] Khilnani argues that the citizens of New India were expected to see the image of their future as projected upon the Bhakra Dam. Khilnani, *Idea of India*, 62

[438] Osborne, *Approaching Monumentality in Archaeology*, 434.

[439] Osborne, 432.

looking integral to the Bhakra Dam and the presence of photography in constructing this. Let us look at this photographic image of the 'future' more closely.

Among the sea of images of the Dam, I want to pick one particular composition that is often repeated. Assembled through a juxtaposition of a huge concrete wall cutting through mountain ranges, reinforcing the might of concrete to stall the flow of a furious river, this prototypical image frames the monumentality of the statist intervention. Itty Abraham talks about the imperative to visibility[440] in India post-1947, seen through a monumental style of state making.[441] What could be more monumental than a fierce stream of Sutlej waters stopped by the might of concrete, photographed expansively in wide-angle landscape and aerial shots!
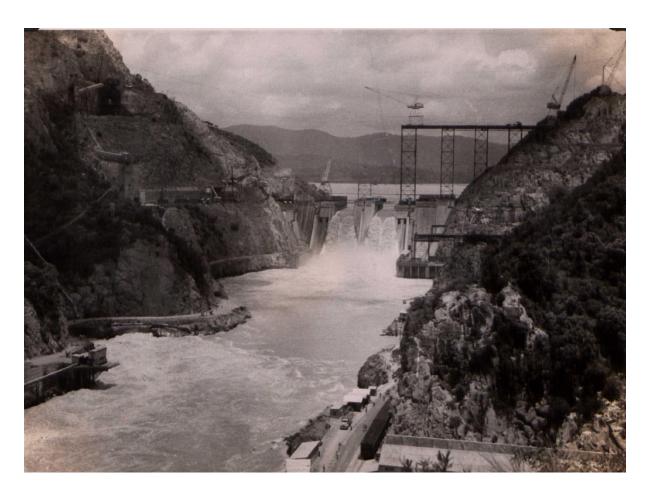
Image 39: Front-view of the Dam, photograph, 62710, NMML, New Delhi.

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[440] Roy, *Beyond Belief*, 38.

[441] For a discussion on the 'monumental' aspect of postcolonial state's scientific and technological visions, Abraham, 'Landscape and postcolonial science,' 164.

Image 39 is one such prototypical image showing the concrete wall forming a giant T-shaped structure with an optimum amount of water flowing out of it. It effectively displays the might of concrete in controlling the flow of water, converting the fierce intensity of the river into a tamed manageable water body and the ability of the state to change the course of nature/history. Several angular and framing variations of this 'Dam Prototype' exist. The upstream view of the Dam wall, an aerial view of the Dam wall with the Gobind Sagar Reservoir in the backdrop, a view of the Dam wall from the side mountain road, and a view of the Dam wall when the river is in full force and the popular night view of the Dam; each of these views, in different combinations, captures the concrete structure of the Dam rising through the river and the mountains. The fact that these photographs were in wide circulation, suggests that from all other possible perspectives and framing choices available, these were presumably thought to be the good Dam photographs which successfully conveyed the 'progress story'.
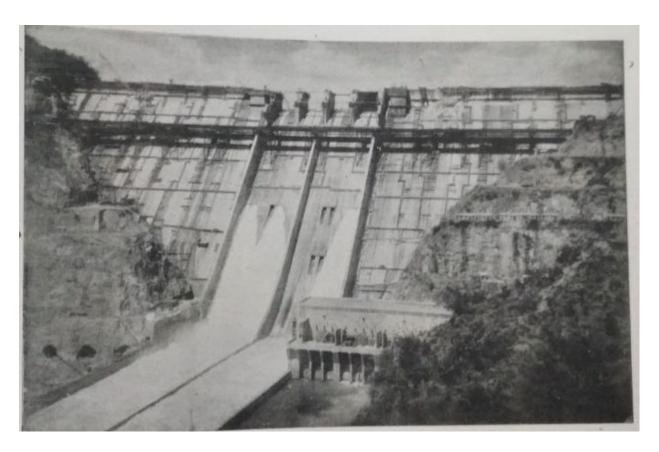
Image 40: Photograph on the back cover, *Commemorative Volume*, October 1963, BBMB, Chandigarh.

Certain aspects of the frame are highlighted in specific narratives. For instance, as the front cover of a Commemorative Volume, the Dam Prototype (Image 40) highlights the completed Dam. This image is a retouched photograph that attempts to heighten the realism of the Dam site by expanding the truth-

potential of the image. It communicates a pleasant situation, with the pale-blue skies matching the softly flowing river underneath. The Dam structure looks like a solid horizontal block emerging from the rocks on the side. There is a clear colour difference between the Dam wall made of concrete and the muddy dark brown of the natural rocks. We have seen a similar contrast in Album 86 where concrete is the preferred aesthetic while showing the new constructions, while the old landscapes are shown as muddy and messy. Another contrast to read is the sharp angular confident form of the Dam wall, in contrast to the soft and amorphous presence of the natural rocks, the messy nature overpowered by the might and technical intellect of the modern nation. Again, sharp linear lines in contrast to the non-linear forms can be understood as the state's preference for modernist linear optics.

In Image 44, the viewer is positioned as though she is standing right in front of the gigantic edifice and is expected to look 'up' in awe of the strength of the concrete and the virtuosity of the construction. In this case, photography acts as the catalyst in creating a response to the monument of Bhakra, especially for a viewer who is not physically present in front of the Dam. Photography thus enables the state to create a monumental presence for the Dam, visualising the future for its new citizens spread across the geography of postcolonial India.

The Dam Prototype moves in bureaucratic circles and official libraries and government databases, constitutive of and reinforcing the existing official narrative. Its primary audience would be the internal departmental officers who use it as a record for posterity. Focussing on the Dam wall in the composition makes it an apt image highlighting the 'glorious achievement' of construction for its bureaucratic audience. Thought of as an impossible task at that time, engineer AN Khosla convinced Nehru to not outsource the construction of the Dam to private players. Instead, the Dam was built by a state institution (BCB) making it a proud achievement for the Indian engineers and bureaucrats involved with the project. In an internally circulated manual, this photograph is iterative of the success of a public institution in building the Dam from the scratch (with foreign support, but not under them).

In another instance, the Dam office room displays a similar image of the Dam wall (Image 41). However, there is a difference in the perspective of the photographer. This photograph takes the same shot from a lower position, from the left side (instead of the right, as in the previous photograph) and is wider in its frame. The compositional assemblage of the river, the Dam wall and the rocks remain constant. The flow of the water is fiercer in this case and serves the purpose of showing the gigantic might of the dam wall to control such a fierce flow and thereby commanding a monumental status. Framing of the photograph through its ability to obstruct the fierce flow of the river water also allows

for an optical justification regarding the height of the Dam. As we know, the height of the Dam was a much-debated topic and led to multiple protests before its construction. Looking into the context of this image, the office room is visited mostly by officials who meet the officer on duty or those 'suspicious characters' who need to be 'checked' before being allowed to go near the Dam. The photograph displayed right above his chair acts to justify the authority of his position to ask questions of the visitors and reifies the dam which the visitors can revere for its might, only after checks and permissions. Here the Dam Prototype functions as a performative, enabling the authority of the office in which it is displayed.
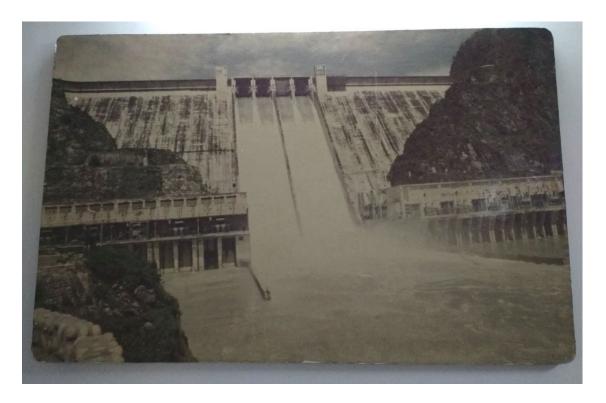
Image 41: Photograph hanging on a wall in the Dam office, approximately 2 ft x 3 ft, January 2019, Nangal.

The cumulative framing of the river water, Dam wall and the rocks around is encoded with literal and symbolic meanings. As it enters a new context, the Dam Prototype transfers its signifiers to the context. The specificity of what is seen in the image does not matter. Rather the Dam Prototype functions as a heuristic that brought together several different ideas–development, modernity, and the might of the state to alter natural (and historical) landscapes. While the Dam Prototype was a sign for modernising India's march towards development, it also had a visual currency within the context of the Cold War. The Bhakra Dam hosted several American engineers and designers during its construction period. Of

all the others, Harvey Slocum's name features prominently in the stories of the Bhakra Dam. Slocum was an American dam expert who joined the Bhakra Dam in 1952 when he was sourced by the Indian Government to work on the Dam because of his practical expertise in building concrete gravity dams.

LIFE magazine for November 03, 1958, carried a feature titled 'India Builds a High Dam in the Himalayas'. It carries a short text alongside three photographs. One is a three-quarter page illuminated night view of the Dam Prototype (which we will return to shortly), the other two photographs are captioned as 'turbaned workers' depicting a group of Sikh men, presumably staff from the project, and the 'American Boss' showing Slocum leaning back on a chair. The latter is credited to photographer James Burke (dated August 1, 1958). A search on the *Getty* website reveals that this photograph of Slocum was not the only photograph taken that day. There are twelve images of Slocum photographed by Burke on the same day and at least three of those photographs have the same indoor setting as 'American Boss' image. Clearly, photographer Burke and the editor had options to choose from and they selected this image and captioned it as the 'American Boss'. Interestingly, in the pictures captured by Burke, and later ignored in the final edit, Slocum is seen holding an idol of Buddha. Given the many years that Slocum spent working in India,[442] his association with India went far beyond him supervising his 'turbaned Indian workers' as the 'American Boss'.[443] Given LIFE magazine's history of projecting an Americanised vision, it ignored the complexity of Slocum's relationship with India, instead portraying Slocum as the 'American' bossing over his 'turbaned workers'. In contrast to this 'American' view, Image 40 as the back cover of an official BBMB publication reveals a different narrative. The latter celebrates the Dam as a nationalistic effort where foreign experts were hired for their technical skills, only in an "advisory" role.[444]

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[442] Popular anecdotes suggest that even though he had a heart condition, he refused to move back home to the US and preferred to stay in India, working on the Dam. The *Commemorative Volume* carries a long essay remembering his contribution to the Dam.

[443] On the American vision in the *LIFE* magazine , see James, *Common Ground, 47*.

[444] *Commemorative Volume*, 40.

Image 42: HS Mathur (possibly), "Bhakra At night (some people call it fairy land!)," photograph, A-403, NMML, New Delhi.

Finally, let us look at the night view of the Dam Prototype that was featured not only in the LIFE essay discussed above but was also circulated in other publications (Image 42). In the image, darkness is illuminated by the electric lights on the Dam wall as the reflection glitters in the river beneath. For a hydroelectric power project that was hailed for its ability to light up the so-called 'backward' areas, the use of electricity in the composition has a special signification. David Nye notes that besides its functional utility, electricity brought in new forms of lighting which fundamentally changed the appearance of the world.[445] As we discussed above with Corbusier's example, the look of Bhakra was an important consideration for the management. Dramatic use of lighting in the night view of the Dam Prototype, offers a possibility of revisualisation the Dam, and in turn the revisualisation of the new nation. It creates a new kind of technological sublime, which as Nye reminds us, expands the focus

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[445] Nye, *American Technological Sublime*, 143.

from machines and man-made structures to control over "a set of visual effects",[446] creating a spectacle of "a man-made world",[447] which is fundamentally a world constructed by the new nation-state.

The contrast of dark and light in the image creates a surrealistic dreamscape, much like the fairy-land referred to in the caption. Its other-worldly nature exaggerates a sense of detachment from the waking eye of the present. Electrical lighting is used to signify a new force, dissolving the distinction between natural and artificial sites, creating a "synthetic environment infused with mystery".[448] This element of surrealist mystery confers upon the creators of the image–the BBMB and the Indian state, a grandiose authority. As another variation of the Dam Prototype, this image could be seen as the state's way of establishing its authority to re-arrange public vision in a specific way.

Seeing Through the State vision: Looking for What is Hidden in the Official Dam Archive

The use of photography's claims of scientific objectivity can be traced to the history of photography's invention and Arago's Report of 1839 which relies on scientific notions of photographic truth. Sekula compares Arago's Report of 1839 with August Sanders' talk in 1931 where he talks of photography as a 'universal language', to argue that irrespective of their vastly different ideologies, they adhere to a common epistemological understanding of photography. Sekula notes:

> *For Arago, photography is a means of aggressively acquiring the world's truth; for Sander, photography benignly disseminates these truths to a global audience. Although the emphasis in the first instance is on the acquisition, and in the second on distribution, both projects are fundamentally rooted in a shared epistemology. This epistemology combines faith in the universality of the natural sciences and a belief in the transparency of representation.*[449]

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[446] Ibid., 145.

[447] Ibid., 143.

[448] Ibid., 152.

[449] Sekula, 'The Traffic in Photographs,' 18.

Taking Sekula's suggestion that no photographic representation is transparent, this section will explore what lies beneath the archive, beneath its garb of photographic transparency, attempting to read the photographic archive from below.[450]

I am choosing to see the BBMB as a photographic site marked by its institutional regulation, authority, and censorship. Its claims of completeness are punctured by an intentional absence of working-class subjectivities.[451] Sekula reminds us that any archive is not neutral, but embodies the power inherent in accumulation, collection, lexicon, and language.[452] It manifests a compulsive desire for harmony, completeness, infallibility, and coherence, imposed by the sheer quantity of visual material under controlling ownership. Photographic archives are structured by remembering and forgetting, in which certain ways of seeing are deliberately excluded or manipulated.[453] This chapter finds motivation in the work of Allan Sekula, Toscano, Karen Cross and Julia Peck to look for the gaps and omissions in the BBMB photo archives challenging its claims of completeness and historical accuracy. In this section, we explore the ocular silences in the statist vision through two examples. First, by exploring the Bhakra Dam as a site of work through a lens informed by subaltern historiographies and second, by investigating the Dam as a work site through the 'risk' involved for the workers.

Deconstructing the Dam as a Site of Work

Bhakra Nangal Dam was built over thirteen years (1949-1963) with its construction proceeding in two stages until its completion. By the end, a total of 5.5 million cubic yards of concrete had been placed in the riverbed to construct the gigantic Dam.[454] The construction process on the Dam site involved different categories of work – unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled, besides the white-collared jobs of engineers, designers, bureaucrats, and their ilk. The photographs from the BBMB archive show several

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[450] Sekula, 'Photography between Labour and Capital,' 127.

[451] Recently Brahma Prakash has written a confrontational piece on the inability of the archive to accommodate Dalit, Bahujan, Adivasi and other subaltern corporeal practices in the Indian context. Brahma Prakash, 'Archives are a SCAM,' *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 2021.

[452] Sekula, 'Photography between Labour and Capital,' 197.

[453] Cross and Peck, 'Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory'.

[454] Prologue, *Commemorative Volume*. ,

workmen engaged in on-site operations such as drilling, digging, excavation, construction, welding, cleaning and so on. There are many images of metal and machines, both in indoor and outdoor settings, concreting activities, alongside pictures of finished canals and completed Dam structures at different stages of the project. An article on Industrial relations in BBMB by on-site engineer JN Sawhney claims that the workers on the Dam site were very satisfied with the management. Sawhney lists the absence of strikes and dharnas and gheraos[455] as evidence of a happy workforce.[456] The article credits the BBMB for being a model employer that keeps its employees happy by caring for the workers, giving uniforms and shoes to class IV employees, and providing housing, medical and maternity care among many other benefits. Through the article, which could be seen as the official narrative, the BBMB tried to portray the Bhakra Dam as a site of a harmonious working relationship between the workers and the administration. However, this was hardly the complete picture.

Ahuja's re-writing of Indian historiography reveals that the late 1940s was not just a period of post-partition nation-building and development. It was a 'catalytic moment' in the definition of labour as a political and social category and as a parameter of postcolonial politics.[457] As early as 1946, the International Labour Organisation's India Report shows the announcement of a five-year program for labour.[458] Labour was a legislative matter at the provincial and central levels according to the Government of India Act 1935 which was later included in the India Constitution of 1950[459]. Formulation of new labour legislations and sustained bureaucratic interest in labour issues suggests that from the late 1940s onwards, there was a period of a labour crisis. This is supported by the concurrence of high labour litigation and a high incidence of strikes all over India around the mid-1950s[460] explaining the BBMB administration's anxiety around unionisation and strikes and its vehement denial in the article by Sawhney.

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[455] Dharna and gherao are popular forms of protest vocabulary, where the protestors either sit-in or block areas.

[456] Sawhney, 'Industrial relations in the BBMB: How to tackle the problem and How solved', *Silver Jubilee Bhakra Dam*, 43. J N Sawhney was the Engineer-in-Chief, Transmission System, BBMB Chandigarh.

[457] Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish". The Crisis of the Late 1940s and the Place of Labour in Post-Colonial India,' 1042–43.

[458] International Labour Organisation, *Monthly Report on India*, October 1946, 11-18.

[459] Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish",' 1044.

[460] Ibid., 1110.
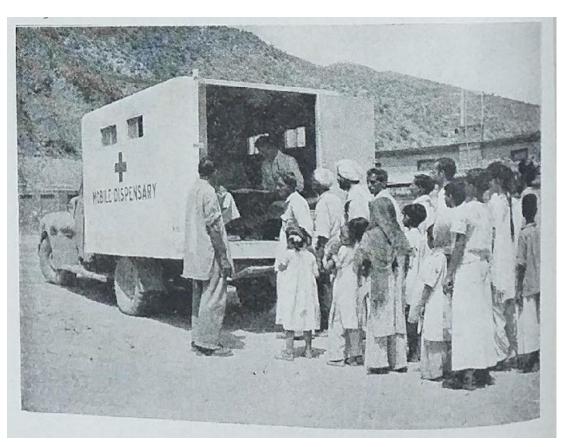
Image 43: Anon.,'Mobile dispensary for distant workmen colonies', photograph, *Commemorative Volume*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

Image 46 is a photograph of workmen waiting outside a mobile dispensary, published in the *Commemorative Volume* as a sign of 'ideal' industrial relations on the Bhakra Dam site. Bhakra Dam's allegorical reference to the nation ensured every aspect of the Dam was a topic of national interest. The photographs published, thus achieved a heightened relevance becoming more than just representations of this particular Dam. The BBMB's attempt to portray harmonious working relations could be seen as a broader portrayal of how the postcolonial nation-state handled the discourse around labour.[461] The photograph here shows a man sitting inside a truck, presumably the doctor/medical attendant who is administering prescriptions to a waiting queue of people. The workmen are shown with their families (women and children in the picture) lining up in an orderly queue to receive their health benefits. Subjects here are docile and servile, waiting for the benign employers to pass the benefits. The space these workmen occupy in the frame is tailored to suit the dramatic narrative of the image. None of the workmen or their family members looks back at the camera, as they must have been clearly instructed not to do so. None of them breaks the queue or shows any visible signs of distress, meekly subscribing

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[461] For a review of anthropological and historical perspectives of India's working class, see Sanchez and Strümpell, 'Anthropological and Historical Perspectives on India's Working Classes'.

to their group identity as beneficiaries. Unlike Roy's photograph which is pulsating with disquiet and frustration at the wait, this photograph reveals the servility and obedience expected of the workmen by their welfarist employer (the Indian state). A similarly servile body language of the workers can be seen in Image 44.

Image 44: Anon., 'Finishing touches are being given to Bhakra Dam: October, 1962', photograph, SRS/October, 1962, A45B, Photos Division, New Delhi.

Building on the linearity of form preferred by the postcolonial nation-state that we discussed in chapter one, I want to again point to the linear aesthetic in this photograph. Unlike the explicit forward-march images we have seen in chapter one, Images 43 and 44 are subtle in their projection. Yet, both images show the photographic subjects standing in a curated order, one behind the other, following a linear trajectory with their gaze, looking out of the frame. It is towards the medicine van and beyond the top-left edge of the frame, and it is downwards on their machines and out of the frame towards the bottom left. The outward gaze looking into the distance, beyond the photographic frame, is a commonly explored motif of linear progression employed by the optics of the postcolonial nation-state. It aligns with its futuristic deference taking the viewer beyond the present moment, into an imaginary and distant future promised by state-envisioned modernity.

I want to bring an image taken by photographer Kulwant Roy (that is not a part of the official BBMB archives) to highlight, by comparison, the curated gaze and state-directed linear vision in Images 43-44 above.

Image 45: Kulwant Roy, 'Waiting for Pay,' photograph, Aditya Arya Collection, Gurgaon. Reproduced from Arya and Kamtekar, *History in the Making*, HarperCollins India, 2010.

Image 45 is a photograph of workmen waiting outside the pay van at Bhakra, taken by photographer Kulwant Roy. This image is not a part of the official BBMB archive, but one of Roy's personal photographs.[462] In the foreground, a group of workers stand whereas the background shows the pay van which was initiated by the government to pay regular wages to the workers. The group seems visibly frustrated[463] which can be inferred by the grumpy expressions and hand gestures of the man with striped pyjamas in the centre. This space is shared by another man with a hat, who is seen standing with a grim face, looking back at the camera with his hands on his waist. Unlike the posed nature of the two images

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[462] Roy's photographs have been recently restored by photographer and curator Aditya Arya and are a part of the Kulwant Roy/Aditya Arya Collection in Gurgaon.

[463] In common parlance, keeping hands on the head could be seen as a sign of being fed up or frustrated.

previously discussed, the photographic subjects here are looking back at the camera with grim expressions suggesting that the photographer possibly interjected an unexpected moment.

Kulwant Roy (1914-1984) was associated with a photojournalism agency called *Associated Press Photos*, first in Lahore and then shifting his base to Delhi. [464] He photographed the anti-colonial movement before 1947 and the making of the postcolonial nation after. He was a well-known independent photojournalist, whose photographs were published in prominent international magazines. One of his prominent projects was documenting the construction of the Bhakra Nangal Dam. I am bringing Roy's image as an example of photographs outside the official archive, to further explore what is missing in the official archive.

While most official photographs of the Dam depict perfectly managed construction sites, aerial shots gigantic in their expanse, and mighty structures that glorify human will over nature, seen in juxtaposition, the above image stands out for portraying a rather banal and unglorified image of the Dam. There is nothing special about the workmen waiting for their pay, nothing spectacular, nothing worthy of glory. In fact, it captures the mundane everyday life of a workman, waiting for their rightful dues, queuing up in desperation.

Another reason for this image to stand out is that it portrays the workers as recalcitrant subjects. A large crowd of men gaze back at the camera, not in the way that suggests servility to the machine like in the colonial images where the subjects were expected to stand stiff facing the lens. Instead, they gaze back with a fatigued curiosity and almost annoyance, redirecting the attention onto the photographer, as if asking him 'why are you interested in this moment?'. Roy was possibly standing close to the group as the group is aware of being photographed. However, despite the proximity of Roy (and his camera), the people betray any anxiety or obedience in their body language. Neither are they provoked to give serious attention to the camera. This could be the result of the workmen being familiar with Roy, or genuinely not caring about striking the perfectly servile pose. As suggested by their lethargic gaze to the camera, their posture and expressions, the subjects here do not deem it worth 're-organising' their attention in servility to the photographic frame. An 'I don't care' attitude marks the subjects here. It celebrates a certain indifference by not posing for perfection, thus letting the unspectacular aspects of

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[464] Sourced from https://mapacademy.io/article/kulwant-roy/ accessed on August 03, 2022.

their work on the Dam surface and thrive. This is in stark contrast to the very serious dedicated workmen presented seen in Image 44 or the docile beneficiaries seen in Image 43.

Roy made a bold attempt to interject a non-spectacular moment from proximity. In return, the subjects reveal a trace of disregard for the spectacularising potential of the photographic lens. As they look back at the camera questioning the photographic interest itself, their gaze remains anchored in the frustrations of the present moment, interrupting the logic of linear progression. It is not the futuristic glory of the Dam that matters. Their preliminary concerns are based on their present - waiting in the sun for their dues, navigating a huge crowd to receive their rightful wages and (possibly) wondering why this photographer is interested in photographing us.

In comparison with Roy's image, the official vision of Images 43 and 44 becomes evident. In alignment with the harmonious relations between the workers and the management described in Sawhney's article, these images work to showcase the BBMB as the ideal employer of satisfied and obedient employees. However, following Allan Sekula, I am motivated to look for working-class subjectivities in these official archives.[465]

All construction jobs on the project were temporary. Workers involved in such jobs were not on regular pay with benefits but paid directly for the work done, referred to as the 'Work Charge Establishment'.[466] Under this system, skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour was hired directly by the executive engineer who tested the men for their trade skills. While the skilled workmen held the possibility of being offered re-employment at other departments within the project, the unskilled and semi-skilled workers remained the most vulnerable to the uncertainties of job loss. According to the 1953 revisions, temporary workers with less than a year of service were given a ten-day notice and those with more than a year of service were given a twenty-day notice before being retrenched. Before 1953, unskilled construction workers could be fired without any notice, revealing the precarious circumstances of their work.[467] In 1983, only seventy-five per cent of the workforce was converted to regular posts.[468]

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[465] Referring to Sekula's methodological intervention in studying mining photographs from management archives of Sheldon Studio, Glace Bay, Cape Breton. Sekula, 'Photography between Labour and Capital'.

[466] *Commemorative Volume*, 41.

[467] For information on the wage rates and labour conditions of the staff at Bhakra, see Prasad and Choudhary, *Dr Rajendra Prasad, Correspondence and Select Documents,* 484-87.

[468] Sawhney, "Industrial relations in the BBMB", *Silver Jubilee Bhakra Dam.*

An appointment relevant to our discussion here is that of the Labour Welfare Officer (LWO) who was reporting directly to the Superintendent Engineer (of) administration. The official role was to enforce labour laws and ensure that the "viewpoint of the administration was properly explained to the labourer".[469] Another article by Sawhney explains the role of the LWO in keeping "a constant watch on the union activities" and "initiating disciplinary action when the union went out of line".[470] The LWO position was created to manage possible conflicts between the Dam administration and workers, in favour of the former. It became the administration's face for dealing with the unionisation of workers which was a massive concern for the administration in that period. The creation of this position also suggests a constant threat of unionisation to the administration. By seeing the unions as 'safe' only when under the watchful eyes of the employer, and not involved in agitation and protests, the postcolonial nation-state reflects the bourgeois fear of the working classes asserting their rights. One way to avoid the rise of working-class politics was to patronise the unions and project them as grateful beneficiaries. of benign management.

Ravi Ahuja notes that the first Five Year Plan saw the category of the 'worker' as a principal instrument in fulfilling the Plan and in the future development of the country. Labour became an object in the technocratic discourse of the postcolonial state. Denied of its political subjecthood, labour and labouring men were reified as harmonious assemblages of the state's developmental vision.[471] Using photographs of disciplined and servile workmen focussed on their jobs, quietly going about their work on the Dam site with pride and patriotism, official optics further denies the political subjectivity of the worker within the developmental vision of the 1950s. Janaki Nair noted how industrial societies increase the utility of the workers' body by diminishing its political force and (attempting to) produce servility and obedience in its stead.[472] However, as the subaltern lens of history writing tells us, in practice, the worker in the 1950s was a highly political figure. And despite its attempts, the statist eye could not strip the worker of political subjectivity.[473]

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[469] *Commemorative Volume*, 44.

[470] There were four major unions were recognised by the BBMB by 1988– i) Bhakra Power Employees' Union ii) Workers' Union, Beas Dam Talwara iii) Beas Sutlej Link Workers Union, Sundernagar iv) BMB Karamchari Sangh, Nangal.

[471] Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish"', 1112.

[472] See Janki Nair's excellent essay on perceptions of mine workers in Kolar Gold Fields, 1890-1946. Nair, 'Dangerous Labour', 19.

[473] Ahuja, 1112.

Risk

An important element to consider while assessing the representations of work at the Dam site is the risk involved on a geographically arduous terrain and technically challenging project like the Bhakra-Nangal Dam. In this section, let us look at the element of risk as a working condition on the Dam site.

Image 46 is a photograph showing three men dangerously clinging to high beams and a safety net under them. The photograph taken from a lower angle frames the men through the net, attempting to highlight the *safety* element of work at Bhakra. However, once the eye observes the men clinging to the roof, it is difficult to see this image as a picture of safety. These men represent *risk* as it existed on the Dam site.

The work cycle at the Dam was comprised of three shifts – day, swing, and graveyard – named as per American practice. The day shift started from 8 am till 4 pm and was the most important shift as the management would be present on the site in this shift. Swing shift followed from 4 pm until 12 am, and then the graveyard shift began from midnight until 8 am the next morning. Each shift included a half-hour interval, mid-way after four hours of working, during which the workers had food, or took a nap. In this continuous cycle of work on treacherous mountainous terrain, accidents were a common phenomenon. There are several instances when the staff has mentioned in passing the risky nature of their job.[474] VN Kaur, Chief Engineer (Retd.), Punjab Irrigation Department writes, "extreme safety measures were taken, but sometimes a stretcher could be seen swinging in the sky as the crane shifted some accident victim down to the waiting ambulance", underlying the looming risk of accident as integral to the work on the Dam site.[475]

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[474] I want to acknowledge that the staff members whose voices were considered significant by the BBMB are possibly the ones to be included Silver and Golden Jubilee publications. This narration is marked by exclusion of those whose views were not considered valuable or in alignment with the official narrative.

[475] VN Kaura, "Work Culture At Bhakra Dam," *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 35. At the time pf publication, Kaura was the Chief Engineer (Retd), Punjab Irrigation Department.
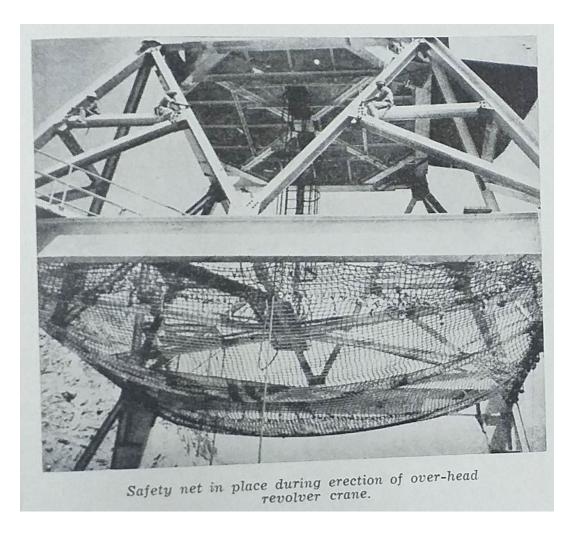
Image 46: Anon., 'Safety net in place during erection of over-head revolver crane', photograph, *Commemorative Volume*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

A more personalised account of risk as an attribute of work has been recorded by RC Narang, who started as a store attendant on the Dam project in December 1955. He writes:

> [sometimes] we had also to double up as a member of the workforce, which had to climb up the hillocks, along the strong ropes tugged to the iron rods, with survey instruments in one hand. We were required to climb up, balancing our bodies to save ourselves and the instruments in the other hand…rocks, boulders, water, everything was treacherous in its own way when working without intensive safety arrangements, unavailable in those days". [476]

The official records however gave little space to acknowledging fear and risk as integral experiences of work on the Dam. Pride in achievement and patriotic sacrifice for the nation are two overwhelming themes that encapsulate the official narratives working on the Dam. However, in this show of pride,

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[476] Ibid., 34.

certain glimpses of fear and risk are made accessible. For instance, SR Sainbhi, who joined the project as an assistant engineer for designs in 1952 mentions the "tough tasks [that] were volunteered with enthusiasm… the bone-chilling wind in winter [which] blew with all its fury in the narrow gorge".[477] SC Sachdeva, who started as a temporary engineer on the construction of the Dam in 1959, mentions the fear he experienced while navigating dangerous geographical conditions, "we would shudder looking down the pit from trestle top to access the progress of work on the left side".[478] In winter, the workmen in the graveyard shifts had to battle 'biting cold and high-velocity winds' moving from the Sutlej river. Although the risky nature of the enterprise was often covered with stories of pride and patriotism, the fear of difficult terrains and the anxiety it provoked related to personal safety remained an essential part of working on the Bhakra Dam.

Before moving ahead, it is important to acknowledge that risk was not a homogeneous category. Rather, it was experienced according to position in the work hierarchy. Beyond the skill divisions such as unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled, the archives reveal that several other hierarchical categories and corresponding practices operated. The work hierarchy can be gauged by an account of everyday commute to the Dam site. The junior officers commuted by bus, senior ones (including the American officers on the plant) travelled by car and in pick-ups, while the blue-collar workers took the train. This train had three categorisations – people displaced by the Dam (called Oustees) were allowed to travel in the guard's compartment, religious workers who carried *prasad* (offering) for the workers, and the rest of the bogies were for the wage-workers, 'hardy workmen' as they were called. RC Narang's account reveals the perception of the workers who travelled on the train. "We used to go to our duties by morning train meant for workers… once in a while, we missed the train and were helped by the engineers who used to travel from Nangal in the four-wheelers, called pick-ups." He specifically recalls the generosity of the American Engineers who offered lifts to workers whenever they spotted them climbing hillocks to reach the site through shorter routes. "No grumbling, no status consciousness while accommodating the workers in the pick-ups… was a great feeling, which we workers always acknowledged".[479] Narang's recollection offers a glimpse of the class (and caste) divisions and uneasiness that existed among the Indian engineers and the workmen and an appreciation for the lack of status consciousness among the American engineers.

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[477] SR Sainbhi, "Witnessing History," *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 62-63.

[478] SC Sachdeva, "My Golden Period At Bhakra," *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 31.

[479] RC Narang, 'My Personal Experiences at Bhakra Dam', *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 34. Narang's account is also useful to understand the differences and hierarchies in expert interaction on developmental projects, discussed in the previous chapter.

Several workmen lost their lives to accidents, while others survived with permanent disabilities.[480] All but four[481] out of one hundred and fifty martyrs listed in the *Commemorative Volume* were blue-collar wage-workers. To prevent casualty, a department was constituted to devise safety measures and encourage the use of safety equipment among workers to reduce the number of accidents.[482] This measure included organising lectures and putting safety signs for workers and offering compensation (higher wage) for hazardous work. Further, only trained staff were put at hazardous points to make workers safety conscious.[483] The administration's emphasis on safety reveals the actual absence of it, and the massive risk to life involved in hazardous work. Janaki Nair writes that accidents (with reference to mines in colonial India) are closely linked to the question of wages and conditions of work.[484] Attributing the responsibility for the accidents to the lack of dexterity and alertness among workers is a manner of diverting attention from the conditions and terms of work which produce the accidents in the first place.[485] A similar anxiety is seen in the safety conversations at Bhakra. By linking training and skill levels to the risk of accidents, the safety discourse at Bhakra seems to be putting the workers in charge of their personal safety, deflecting the management and the state's responsibility in creating a risk-free site of work.

Although written in a later period, Ulrich Beck's writing on risk makes a point relevant to our discussion. Risk, for Beck, is a sort of "counter-modernity", which came to be a feature of (second) modernity[486] where threats (accidents) are not external but produced as unintended consequences of modernisation itself. The creation of massively complex systems such as dams, nuclear reactors, and air traffic control

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[480] Strangely the brochure lists this information to give evidence of how fair an employee the BBMB was, as it gave due compensation according to the rule book. SC Katoch, 'Reminiscences of Bhakra Dam', *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 53.

[481] One sectional officer, one superintendent engineer, one subdivisional officer and one American assistant supervisor (mechanical).

[482] *Commemorative Volume*, 40.

[483] *Ibid.*, 44.

[484] Nair, 'Dangerous Labour', 38.

[485] Ibid., 36.

[486] I am referring to Adam Tooze's reading of Beck's ideas in the context of the coronavirus pandemic. Tooze, 'The Sociologist Who Could Save Us from Coronavirus'.

systems meant accidents were normal.[487] With two hundred and thirty-eight officially acknowledged accidents that happened during the construction of the Bhakra Dam,[488] an undefined omnipresent risk experienced personally and collectively was an essential working condition for the workers. Risks only exacerbated over time but the postcolonial state deflected its responsibility, as seen in the handling of the well-known 1959 Bhakra Dam Mishap. Let us analyse it in detail.

The Dam Mishap -1959

On 29th August 1959, at about 2 pm, the water began to ooze through a hairline crack near the tunnel mouth which quickly swelled up into a miniature fountain. By 5 pm, the water rushed to the visitor's gallery into the Left Power Bank. Soon water submerged the generators leading to the death of ten men in the accident.[489] Extensive rescue efforts were undertaken to get the construction back on track. An official enquiry was constituted under AN Khosla and its findings were published in 1960.[490] The report reveals a possibility that the accident was caused due to negligence. The oscillations of counterweight spindles causing vibrations since July 1958 were ignored until August 1959 when the accident happened. The report acknowledges a knocking sound at gate number three on 17th and 18th August 1959, which the officer-in-charge brushed away as "the noise of rolling stones along the (river)bed". This noise was reported to Mr. Gill, the Director of Directorate of Inspection and Control on the morning of the 19th of August. The inspection also revealed two hair cracks. Despite clear signs, the report mentions that the officers waited until the morning of the 21st when the cracks increased to a pin-size hole from where water was slowly leaking. It was only after hearing a clear metallic thunder at 2.20 pm that day, that emergency barricades were put up and a structural failure was acknowledged. The official

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[487] Referring to Charles Perrow's argument on the 'normality' of accidents in complex technocratic organisation systems. Perrow, *Normal Accidents*.

[488] The estimate is based on Y Narain, *Rajya Sabha at Work,* 397.

[489] Besides the Dam Mishap, some other accidents on the Dam include (but are not limited to) 'heavy slide on right clay stone bend, where machinery and men were evacuated before a major slide, the collapse of the central wall of the main spillway in length 105 feet'. see, Katoch, "Reminiscences of Bhakra Dam," 54. There is also mention of 'the sinking of the conveyor belt at 1400 elevation in August 1955, the collapse of the cement silo of the central batching and mixing plant bringing the concrete operations to a dead halt' in RS Gill, "Moments of Agony and Ecstasy at Bhakra," *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 41.

[490] Khosla et al, *Bhakra Dam Mishap: Report Of The Enquiry Committee*, Vol 1, 1960, Central Secretariat Library, New Delhi. Accessed on https://www.indianculture.gov.in/bhakra-dam-mishap-report-enquiry-committee.

enquiry report mentions nothing about the death of ten men except that when officer-in-charge Gill left the site at 5.30 pm, he stationed two men at the end of the tunnel to watch the flow conditions. It is known that around 6 pm, nine hundred cusecs of water rushed through various galleries to the left powerhouse, lifting the emergency gates out of their grooves, twisted, and scattered through the hoist chamber.[491]

What happened to those two men who were stationed by Gill to watch and wait for the disaster? What about the people who lost their lives, and those who continued working on the Dam site after this incident knowing the precarity of their working conditions and the vulnerable nature of their job? The report conveniently bypasses these questions. On difficult terrain, death (or injury) of a previous batch of workers (or colleagues) becomes a marker of memory.[492] such that the risk of injury or death becomes a consistent working condition. Those who survived or witnessed the accident and continued to work on the site carried a memory of the risk that the Dam site entailed.

The final section of the enquiry report states the causes of the accident and the lessons learnt. Elaborating solely on the structural and design deficits, the language of the report seeks to impersonalise the cause of the accident. Beck's work highlights the institutionally manufactured risks induced by modernisation, which are invisible to individual cognition. As Beck puts it, complex systems ensure a loss of individual "cognitive sovereignty"[493] and produce threats that are manufactured industrially, due to the complex design. And these threats are further minimised politically.[494]

A scientistic paradigm reduces risk to a matter of expertise and training which sees it as 'manageable' by upgrading one's personal skills instead of requiring any institutional rethinking. There is also an active effort not to delve too much into the reasons for failure but focus on solutions. Datta in his memoir of the accident sums up the lesson from the accident, "keep your calm in face of adverse circumstances; plan and attack the problem frontally, rather than waste time in analysing the causes of failures, which can be deferred"[495]. A statist perception of risk may be a calculation, but public perception of risk is a

[491] Ibid., 16.

[492] J Nair, 'Dangerous Labour', 59.

[493] Beck, Lash, and Wynne, *Risk Society*, 53.

[494] On the political and sociological implications, Beck and Grande, 'Varieties of Second Modernity'.

[495] OP Datta, "Down the Memory Lane.," *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, BBMB, 52.

"complex amalgam of emotions, interests and values".[496] Risk is thus experiential[497] for those working on difficult accident-prone terrain, rather than scientifically and statistically produced.[498]

How did this accident change the nature of working conditions for the construction worker? What was it for the unskilled worker with a salary wage scale of two rupees a day to continue working on a site which had just seen a mammoth accident that revealed the multiple risk factors associated with the Dam site? While the wages remained the same, the accident did certainly accentuate the precarious work conditions on the Dam site.

The enquiry report makes the accident appear to be a technical tragedy and shifts the accountability away from official actors. However, the role of the postcolonial nation-state in envisioning, implementing, and supervising a complex and risky work site such as this one, cannot be ignored. RS Gill, who spent twelve years on Design, Inspection and Construction of Bhakra Dam, attributes most failures/slippages to supervision failures. Harvey Slocum was also known to emphasize supervision as a necessity for avoiding accidents. Whose supervision failure was this? Why was no accountability fixed for a glaring supervisory error?

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[496] Satterfield, Mertz, and Slovic, 'Discrimination, Vulnerability, and Justice in the Face of Risk'.

[497] Brian Wynne, "May the sheep safely graze? A reflexive view of the expert-lay knowledge divide," in Lash, Szerszynski, and Wynne, *Risk, Environment and Modernity*.

[498] Burgess, Wardman, and Mythen, 'Considering Risk'.

DAMAGED FLOOR OF THE HOIST
CHAMBER- LEFT UPSTREAM VIEW
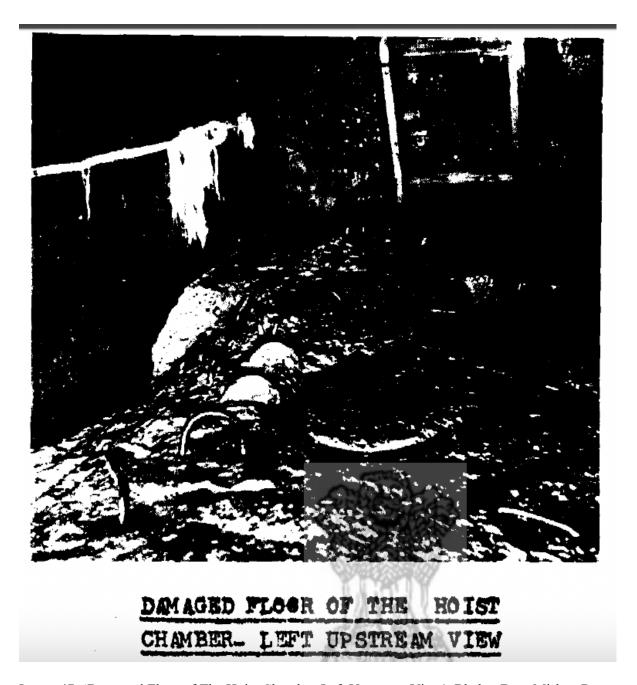
Image 47: 'Damaged Floor of The Hoist Chamber-Left Upstream View', Bhakra Dam Mishap Report of the Enquiry Committee, 1960.

The mishap enquiry report also contains some photographs. These photographs are dull and dark with not much visibility in the digital copy. Without seeing the captions, the photographs are almost incomprehensible. From the captions, we know that they show the damage on the hoist chamber, the damaged floor of the chamber, bent and twisted erection beam, jumbled up pipelines and small pieces of damaged gates. All these photographs focus on the 'broken' materials as an index of the damage done, bypassing any reference to the officers-in-charge, or those who were killed by the accident (see Image 47 for an example). The focus is on empty sites and damaged materials, which convey the terror

of water flowing at a very high velocity as the main vector of the accident story. The photographic archive of the Dam, as discussed earlier, is built through these optical silences. The Bhakra-Nangal Dam, as a nationalist allegory had a lot riding on its public image. It was an interruption to the forward march of the postcolonial nation and its ambition of linear progression. Risks and accidents disturbed the rhetoric of the nation, as they presented a dissonance in the linear vision. Realising the potential of this accident to disturb the developmental optics of the state, information and visibility of the accident was 'managed'. Photographs from the enquiry report, even though incomprehensible in their digital form, become documents[499] with an interruptive potential as they remind us of a space and time which was an aberration in the story of man's victory over nature, in turn amplifying the uncertainties within the postcolonial utopic aspirations.

Beck writes that risks are an object of social staging and a feature of institutional relations of domination which revolve around power, interests, benefits, and losses.[500] Who benefited from this accident and whose interests were protected after the accident? These are important questions to ask from the archive. While I do not have more specific information on the exact administrative and safety changes this accident brought about, it would be valid to say that the accident did amplify the limitations of the modernist dream of man overcoming nature without any consequences. It also revealed uncertainty, risk of injury and death and subsequent insecurity as essential working conditions on the Dam site. The state, on the other hand, did its best to manage the story. The available official photographs show how the accident was visually 'managed' by the BBMB and the Indian state.

One way of visually managing the accident was to bypass photographic documentation for a diagrammatic representation devoid of any human presence. Image 48 published in the *Commemorative Volume* describes the accident as 'flooding'[501] of the Dam galleries, implicating the unruly flow of heavy water. Such a representation abstracts the human loss (and risk for those still working on the site) into a visual of mismanaged water. Katherine Gibson reads tables, graphs, maps, and other such diagrammatic representations as practices of spatial governmentality.[502] The diagrammatic representation above lists several figures to depict the amount of water in storage at the reservoir, the amount of water flowing through the Dam wall and so on. Depicting the reality of the accident through

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[499] On the commercial documentary nature of photographs, Nesbit and Atget, *Atget's Seven Albums*.

[500] Beck, *World at Risk*, 47–76.

[501] Term used in *Commemorative Volume*, 29.

[502] K Gibson, 'Regional Subjection and Becoming', 642.

numbers, arrows and lines can be read for the modernist understanding of data and numbers as inoffensive[503] and to their objectivity which implied the "rule of law, not of men". It also suggests a subordination of personal interests and prejudices to public standards.[504] In the context of the postcolonial state's modernising drive, the accident was a major hiccup. It challenged the state's assertion of taming nature. The diagrammatical image can be read as one way of taking the control back into the 'objective' hands of the state, iterating its ability to measure and mark, thus re-establishing its governmentality into the spatial landscape of the Bhakra Dam. Through an objective visual marking of the accident, the order of the state was reconvened.
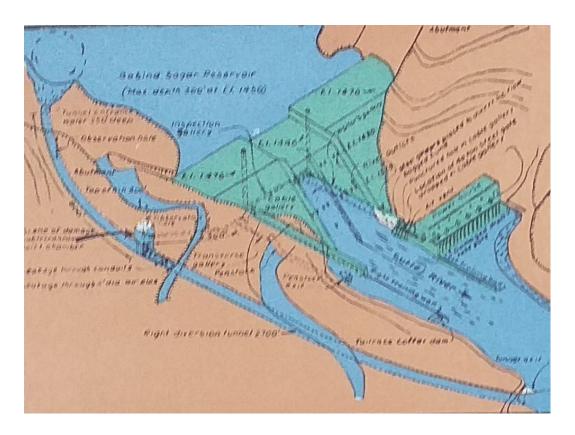
Image 48: Colour diagram showing the accident site, *Commemorative Volume*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

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[503] On the politics of numbers, Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900*.

[504] K Gibson, 'Regional Subjection and Becoming'.
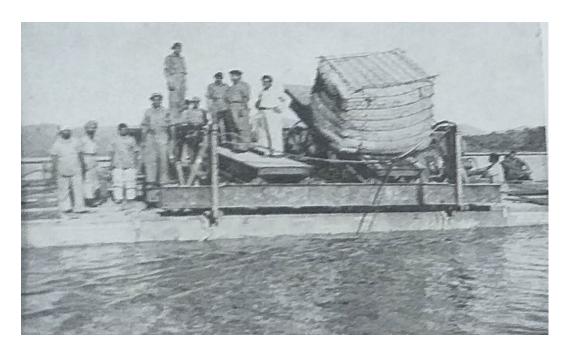
Image 49: Photograph showing rescue work after the accident, *Commemorative Volume*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

Another strategy for recalibrating the authority of the state in the aftermath of the accident can be seen in Image 49 published in the same volume. It is a photograph of the rescue operations in the aftermath of the accident. Army engineers were called to assist under Lt. Col. PLN Choudhary. 624 Corps Troops Engrs and 624 Army Troop Engrs participated in OP MADHURI (the official name of the rescue mission) to drain the flood water from the powerhouse.[505] Several people are a part of this composition. While the accident was defined as technical and abstract, rescue operations are defined through human presence, specifically through the army's presence. The army is a metaphor for the Indian state to manage the difficulties arising in its developmental work. By humanising the rescue operations, the Indian state consolidates its image as the paternal welfare state to the rescue.

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[505] Gill, 'Moments of Agony and Ecstasy at Bhakra', 40-41.
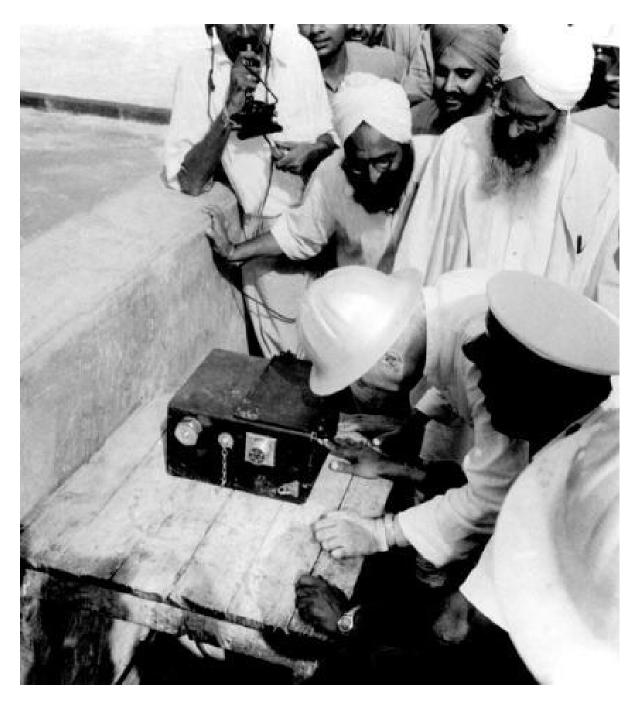
Image 50: Anon., 'Bhakra Dam Mishap 1960: The Prime Minister listening to a Navy Diver, from underwater, through a mechanical device at Bhakra', photograph, A45bi, Photos Division, New Delhi.

Several similar pictures of OP MADHURI exist in different archives, each consolidating the presence of the state in fixing the accident. In the Photos Division collection, there are several images under the title Bhakra Dam Mishap. All of them depict the army at work and show aerial pictures of the Dam after it was fixed. One such image is Image 50 which shows Nehru using a device to listen to a Navy diver underwater while being surrounded by a group of men. As discussed above, showing the accident through the rescue work is a deliberate choice to suppress the physical accountability of state actors in

maintaining safety on a high-risk work site. But it is not just a deflection at work. The state actively uses the accident as an opportunity to establish its role as the protector. Nehru as the focus of this image *about* the Dam mishap conveys the centrality of state presence and state efforts not just in the construction of developmental projects, but in its regulation and management too.

On the inauguration day, Nehru made a reference to the worker's contribution to the making of modern India, elevating their status as patriotic heroes. In his inauguration speech, he said to the workers, "This Dam is not meant for our generation alone but for many generations to come as well who will drive benefits from it. You have participated in a historic and momentous effort and those who partake in such a noble cause rise in stature themselves". In the case of accidents, which frequently occur, the workers were cast as martyrs in the cause of nation-building. Their martyrdom was publicly acknowledged by several high-ranking government officials.[506] In Katoch's words, "an important Nation building structure has been created due to their (worker's) sacrifices. And the prosperity of Punjab, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi, and HP [Himachal Pradesh] has been built on [these martyrs]."[507] To summarize, on the Bhakra Dam site, workers were simultaneously portrayed as the hero when they survived the risk and the martyr when they perished. The risks, losses, and vulnerabilities of working on such hazardous sites are hidden by celebratory images and exalted narratives of pride and patriotism. Such images divert the accidental risks and injuries into a narrative of sacrifice in favour of the new nation. Sadanandan points out the use of 'romantic realism' to represent universal labour, in a way that labouring bodies are recognised as working-class inclusion in the construction of modern India. These bodies are used heroically, to suggest inclusivity and complicity in constructing the Indian modern under the post-colonial state. Without situating these labouring bodies in their localised and caste-specific trajectories which frame the nature and exploitative pattern of labour, the 'romantic realism' in pictorial representation "extracts the specificities of the bodies… and replaces them with an abstract conception of a working-class body."[508]

We do not have much information on how the lower rung of workers, especially those doing contractual daily wage or hazardous work saw their role in the narrative of modern India. The workers received identification tokens for their work on the great Bhakra Dam. Official records suggest that some of

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[506] The *Commemorative Volume* published a region-wise list of a hundred and fifty 'martyrs'. *Commemorative Volume*, 81-83.

[507] Katoch, 'Reminiscences of Bhakra Dam', *Golden Jubilee Issue*, BBMB, 55.

[508] Santhosh, 'What Was Modernism (in Indian Art)?', 61.

these were carried back home on holidays with pride, as it improved their prospects in marriage.[509] Were the workers as proud as they were portrayed officially? Did they see themselves as equal participants in the development process? This needs to be investigated further. Referring back to Ahuja's scholarship, this Dam was constructed in a period that saw several worker conflicts in India, suggesting that all was not as perfect as portrayed. During the 1962 war with China, the state enforced several work restrictions in the name of patriotic duty. Among them were abolishing free Sundays and overtime wages, and a compulsory push to give one day's earnings to the National Defence Fund. It also imposed a blanket ban on strikes in industries related to defence and development. The left-leaning All India Trade Union Committee (AITUC) Reports from those years reveal intense worker dissatisfaction with these enforcements.[510]

Sacrifice and martyrdom were common themes in the making of the Dam. The question that needs to be asked is who were these martyrs? As discussed above, a majority of those who lost their lives on the construction site were workers who were at the lower end of the wage scale and worked in risky conditions. While the BBMB tried to portray a harmonious management-worker relationship, this harmony was fraught with several contradictions. It was a harmony that tried to cover up the responsibility of the management in reducing accidents and providing better working conditions and wage benefits through images of safety nets and mobile dispensaries.

As the poster image of postcolonial India, a lot of attention was paid to depicting Bhakra as an ideal site of work where the proud 'worker patriot'[511] labours fearlessly in the service of the nation and dies the death of a martyr. This link between patriotism and work has been constantly emphasised in the years after independence. Through constant stress on the difficulty and scale of the work, the object of the work is asserted as the nation itself. As Deshpande notes, "Patriotism is quite literally the act of building the nation."[512] The Bhakra project, like several other development projects in India, was fractured with divisive and hierarchical work structures, which placed certain bodies more in risk than some 'others' (read, privileged caste bodies), where risk-induced uncertainty and insecurity were a persistent working condition and where the workers unionised to fight for better wages and work

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[509] Ibid.

[510] Sriwastava, '26th Session of the AITUC. Coimbatore, January 1961'.

[511] Referring to Satish Deshpande's use of the term, *producer patriot*. See, Deshpande, 'Imagined Economies: Styles of Nation-Building in Twentieth Century India'.

[512] Ibid., 25.

conditions.[513] Amidst these contradictions, photography in the hands of the state was a tool for whitewashing the cracks and inconsistencies in the management's celebratory narrative. The authentic experience of workers and labour conditions are absent from the official archive unless one reads the photographs through a subaltern lens enquiring into the labour histories that this mammoth archive could be hiding, and through comparisons and juxtapositions with photographs outside the official archive (such as the image taken by Kulwant Roy discussed earlier). The next section will further continue this investigation into the optical omissions of the postcolonial nation-state.

Looking for Omissions: The Question of Displacement

In January 2019, I met Shri Nandlal Sharma, a seventy-six-year-old activist who has been at the forefront of the Bhakra Oustee struggle for resettlement and rehabilitation. Sharma, a softly spoken and demure man, generously showed us the beautiful riverine landscape at the back of his home in a village in the Bilaspur district. As we took a boat across the beautiful lakeside, he pointed toward a location on the lake, and said, "This is the house where I grew up. We lived just by the river." I struggled to find any trace of the mentioned house, only to realise that he was referring to a part of the lake in which his ancestral home was submerged more than sixty years ago. The riverine landscape, whose beauty is now a marketed tourist attraction, lays witness to a burial of four hundred and seventy-one villages[514] and the old Bilaspur town. This section looks at the official photographic narrative of the Bhakra Dam through the perspective of development-induced displacement. In the process, I will bring some new material in order to explore the omissions in official sources.

The Bhakra-Nangal Dam was one of the earliest instances of dam-related displacement,[515] in postcolonial India. While there was major pre-publicity for the Dam scheme, its official origin has been

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[513] After the construction, a large number of workers were retrenched, and had to fight their case to avert the retrenchment. One such case of organising of temporary labour under the banner of Bhakra Nangal Mazdoor Sangh, an affiliation of Indian National Trade Union Congress, is noted in Prasad and Choudhary, *Dr Rajendra Prasad, Correspondence and Select Documents,* 487. Ahuja also writes about the role of a competitive and pluralistic trade union culture as responsible for checking the authoritarian state and its regime of industrial relations. Ahuja, '"Produce or Perish", 1110.

[514] The exact numbers vary according to different sources. This estimate is from Nandlal Sharma.

[515] There is considerable scholarship on development-related loss and displacement, and the environmental discourse in general. Hussain, *Interrogating Development*; Mathur, *Displacement and Resettlement in India*; Bisht, 'Development-Induced Displacement and Women'; D'Souza, *The Narmada*

dated to a note written by Sir Louis Dane in November 1908 where he commented on the 'narrow' gorge between the Shivalik hills as an ideal spot to dam the flow of the Sutlej River. By 1919, the plan was to build a four hundred feet high irrigation-only project. In 1938-39, Rohtak and Hissar districts experienced a severe drought making the Bhakra Dam project a significant one in the public eye. By 1942, the project was reenvisaged as an irrigation plus hydro-electric power generation project with a height of 500 ft. from foundation to roadway level and maximum Reservoir Level (RL) 1600.[516] The construction of the Dam required massive areas from the erstwhile princely state of Bilaspur to be submerged under the Dam reservoir. Bilaspur or Kahlur (as it was called) was an independent hill state and Raja Anand Chand was its last ruler until it was merged with Himachal Pradesh in 1954. When AN Khosla, the chief engineer of Punjab and Raja Anand Chand met in 1938, the latter insisted that the height of the Dam be restricted to maximum RL 1580, twenty feet below the level of Bilaspur town. In 1949, when the work on the Dam formally started, India was an independent nation on the verge of becoming a Republic and Bilaspur was a small princely state already (unwillingly) annexed to the Indian Union. A year later the Bhakra Control Board (BCB) was established by the Government of India. Even though Bilaspur was a member of the board, its status as a Union Territory under the Centre meant that it had less bargaining power.[517]

Around this time, Chief Engineer and Secretary to the Government of Punjab, A N Khosla led the official negotiations with the Raja of Bilaspur to increase the height of the Dam to RL 1680.[518] A minimal increase in the Reservoir Level was estimated to push acres of land (ancestral homes and agricultural land both) under the roaring Sutlej waters. Contrasting accounts available to us reveal that these negotiations were not straightforward, with the AN Khosla finally convincing the Raja of Bilaspur to agree to RL level 1680, submerging the old Bilaspur town, *Naggar* as it was called, along with neighbouring villages. It is noted even in the most critical accounts of the Dam that during its conception, the monarchy and citizens of Bilaspur saw this as a great opportunity to put Bilaspur on the

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Dammed; Drèze and Sen, *India: Development and Participation* ; Sundar, 'Unpacking the "Joint" in Joint Forest Management'; Pereira and Seabrook, 'Asking the Earth the Spread of Unsustainable Development'; Gadgil and Guha, *This Fissured Land*; Gadgil and Guha, *Ecology and Equity*; Gadgil and Guha, 'Ecological Conflicts and the Environmental Movement in India'. Baviskar, 'Ecology and Development in India'; Baviskar, 'Nation's Body, River's Pulse'; Scudder, *The Future of Large Dams*; Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests*.

[516] This account is from AN Khosla, 'A Dream comes True,' *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, 10-13.

[517] Bilaspur's status as a union territory meant that there was no elected representative from Bilaspur Bhakra Control Board. This argument is put forward in S S Chandel, *Bilaspur Through the Centuries*.

[518] Khosla, 'A Dream Comes True,' 13-14.

world map and therefore were keen on going ahead with the project. At the same, they were not happy with the increased height that threatened to submerge large parts of Bilaspur.

Post partition, the problems compounded. A huge influx of refugees meant that Punjab was no longer in the position to provide resettlement land to the Oustees as promised. The Central Government took over the responsibility of constructing a new township for the displaced people and appointed a Rehabilitation Committee under the BCB in 1952 to hold discussions with the Oustees and earmark land for dispossessed cultivators. Simultaneously, there were attempts to politically organize the displaced villagers. Later, he also contested elections at the state level. A Bhakra Oustee's rights protection committee was formed, suggesting that this transition was not smooth for either party. Displacement-related discontent has been a part of the very conception of development projects. In the case of Bilaspur, the displacement concerns were compounded by a slow and fractured transition of political power from the local monarchy to a centralised postcolonial government. These concerns will frame our context as we explore the ocular silence on dam-related displacement.

The Reservoir as A Screen for Displacement: Scanning the Official Archive for Clues

The construction of a 225.55 meters concrete Dam wall created the Govind Sagar Reservoir, spread over a hundred and sixty-eight kilometres, with a water storage capacity of nine thousand three hundred and forty million cubic meters. This Reservoir immersed about 16835 ha of old Bilaspur town and neighbouring villages displacing thirty-six thousand people.[519] Today the Dam reservoir is a tourist attraction and a picnic spot amidst the picturesque Shivalik ranges. There are several photographs of this reservoir lake, each capturing its beauty in the backdrop of the Shivalik range. I want to consider one such image here.

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[519] While the estimates vary, I am drawing from Pirta, Chandel, and Pirta, 'Attachment and Displacement,' 3.

THE GOBINDSAGAR
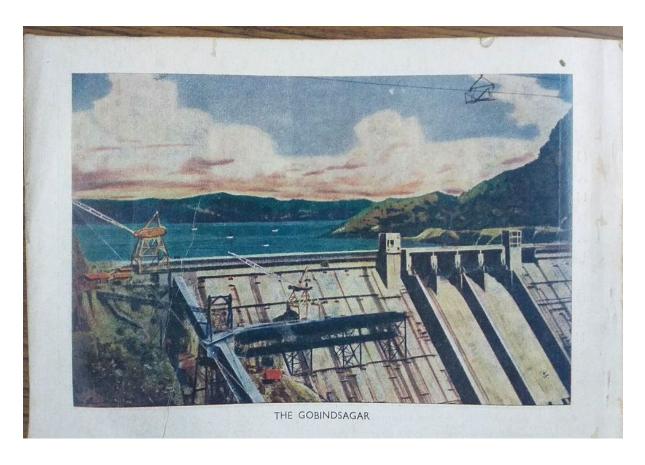
Image 51: Anon., 'The Gobind Sagar', photograph on the back cover, *Commemorative Volume*, BBMB, Chandigarh.

The back cover of the *Commemorative Volume* published in 1963 is a photograph of the Gobind Sagar reservoir. The composition of Image 51 divides the frame into two horizontal parts - the top half captures a small patch of the reservoir with the Shivalik hills and rocks in the background, while the bottom half depicts the Dam construction and the Left Powerhouse. The construction takes up the central space in the frame until the title of the image reminds us to observe the reservoir behind the structure. Taken from a distance, this eye-level view presents the reservoir as a striking landscape within the Shivalik ranges, presenting a picturesque 'naturalised' backdrop that is juxtaposed with the concrete construction in the foreground. Similar pictures of the reservoir capturing the aesthetics of the reservoir lake within a picturesque backdrop exist within the BBMB archives. It is only when one correlates Nandlal Sharma's story with this picturesque photograph that the tragedy of the aesthetic becomes evident. The photograph of the reservoir is a physical reminder of the submerging of people's land and the end of their status as locals. It is the filling up of the reservoir that makes 'Oustees' of the local village population, an identity that has tragically stuck to them to date. The 'Oustee' refers to those removed from their land of origin. This photograph, to an informed viewer, reveals the tragedy of the Sutlej waters engulfing not just the lived habitats of local people, but also their ancestry, memory, and their status as local citizens. It is a physical reminder of their eviction from rightful citizenship, a

recognition of their in-between status as Oustees. It is a state where their citizenship is suspended, as they wait to be 'resettled' and rehabilitated. The Bhakra Dam Oustees were one of the first displaced communities in independent India, which since then has accumulated a history of development-related displacement.

As the back cover of the brochure, the placement of the photograph is also revealing. It seems to represent a "happy end" to the story of the Dam construction, detailed in the book. The concocted serenity of the image lures the audience into believing the picturesque ideals of the landscape and actively re-align the space as an achievement of postcolonial India. Such efforts are supplemented with official stories of the reservoir as a picnic site. Chander Gupta, a daughter of an employee of the BBMB, remembers her childhood interaction with Gobind Sagar Lake as a picnic spot and luxury site. She describes the reservoir as "a man-made marvel, whose depth and expanse left us invariably spellbound".[520] Similar accounts express amusement and appreciation at the ability of man to create this wonder omitting what has been buried in its 'depth' and 'expanse'.

I want to read the image of the Gobind Sagar Reservoir as a screen that covers up significant painful memories associated with the Dam building process. Freud's work on 'screen memory' suggests that memory makes a choice about which elements to retain and which to omit (rather than forget).[521] This choice is based on two criteria – the significance of the memory which supplies the reason for remembering, and the resistance to remembering which supplies the reason for the omission. It is the second criterion that is of relevance to my discussion here. What constitutes the reason for omitting the mammoth displacement question from the official archive? One simplistic answer could be the terms of ownership. Since the archive is owned by the government, they only want us to see the propaganda of development. However, much more significant is the question of how the pain of displacement is visually omitted. Freud's writing on screen memories allows us to explore these omissions. Freud notes with respect to infantile memory that "what is recorded is a mnemonic image not relevant to the experience itself". Instead, what is recorded in the memory is a psychical element closely associated with the objectionable one. The mnemic image stored is a less significant one, consciously displacing the former, more painful instance.[522] In other words, the essential elements of an experience are replaced by the inessential elements of the *same experience.*

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[520] Chander Gupta, 'Down the memory lane,' *Golden Jubilee Bulletin*, 66.

[521] Freud, 'Screen Memories', 306.

[522] Ibid., 307.

Considering Derrida's conceptualisation of the archive as a storehouse much like memory, a wealth of meanings can be uncovered from the seemingly innocuous inessential images stored such as the image of the picturesque reservoir. It acts as a screen that consciously omits the more painful reality of development-related displacement. The essential experience of displacement finds no acknowledgement in the archive and is actively suppressed by innocuous and unrelated photographs such as this one. Freud also suggests that falsification of memories often serves the purpose of repression by suppressing objectionable impressions[523]. One such attempt at suppression can be seen in this photograph. The picturesque beauty of the reservoir becomes a narrative tool for repressing the objectionable story of how people's land was submerged to form the reservoir. It can further be argued that these photographs of the reservoir lake show no concern for historical accuracy, much like Freud's screen memories.[524] Instead, they served another purpose, of deflection from the more painful (and damaging) reality.

One evidence of the inaccuracy of the memory is evident when there is a contrast between the "acting and recollecting ego".[525] In other words, when the seer perceives herself as part of the scene, it suggests that the memory has been tampered with. In the above photograph of the Gobind Sagar Reservoir, the photograph frames the state (in the form of the Dam construction) within the scene. Even when the photograph seemingly shows the reservoir (as captioned), the seer as the state remains an integral part of the scene. This can be read as proof that the original impression of the reservoir lake that was created through massive displacement has been tampered with to include the perspective of the state (the seer and the re-collector, here).

Seeing the reservoir photographs as a screen frees us from the need to understand photographs for their authenticity and accuracy. Instead, it allows us to probe the archive for what has been actively suppressed and omitted from its store. My use of Freudian concepts to understand photographic histories is drawn from David Bate, who relates the capacity of natural memory to the function of photographs as 'artificial memories'[526]. Interestingly, Bate suggests that the more 'permanent memories' turn out to be based on forgetting, a substitution of one memory by another or one memory

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[523] Ibid., 322.

[524] Ibid.,

[525] Ibid., 321.

[526] Bate, 'The Memory of Photography', 251.

embedded into another.[527] These screen memories are then neither true nor false, but an act of suppression. The official archive, as a stand-in for the postcolonial state, suppresses the knowledge of displacement. This suppressed information disturbs the developmental optics of the postcolonial nation-state. However, no omission is complete. Ambiguities and confusions crack up the neatly organised screen of the official photographic archive.

Some textual references show the presence of the displaced people and their concerns during the construction stage. For instance, as mentioned earlier, the train that ferried workers to the construction site reserved a special bogie for the Oustees. It suggests that the displaced people were a part of the normal day-to-day functioning of the Dam site. The myriad photographs that capture the glory of the Dam were taken, edited, and published by staff. which was aware of the displacement concerns, on a site where those displaced routinely intersected paths with the Dam staff and workmen. SR Sainbhi, an executive engineer at the Dam division in 1959, did the work of land acquisition in the reservoir area extending to Bilaspur Mandi. He mentions participating in rehabilitating the Oustees of Bhakra in the Hissar district. "Shelter huts, well and hand pumps were provided in villages for convenience of the Oustees for their resettlement."[528]   Such messaging, though propagandist in tone, officially acknowledges the concerns of the displaced people and the state's responsibility in ameliorating them. In its attempt to hurriedly gloss over the contradictions, the mention of rehabilitation does reveal the state's anxieties about its own role in displacing its citizens.

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[527] Ibid., 253.

[528] Sainbhi, 'Witnessing History,' 66.

Image 52: Anon., 'The Buildings etc. in old Bilaspur which were submerged in water of the Bhakra Dam reservoir', photograph, PD/KL/October 1962, A47p. Photos Division, New Delhi.

Cracks are also revealed in the official records when a rare photograph acknowledging the state's role in displacement is found in the Photos Division collection. Image 52 acknowledges the structures that were lost to the Dam project. Interestingly, there is no human presence in the frame, making these structures disengaged concrete relics, distant from their connection to people's memories and lived experiences. However, even the decaying columns and worn-off paint suggest an important visual presence amidst the myriad photographs celebrating the project. This image points out the multiple and sometimes contradictory contingencies that survive within the official archive. While a majority of the photographic collection remains curated and edited to perfection, the gigantic nature of the archive can leave some space for a rare obtrusion to survive.

Seeing (Unlike) the State: Development from the Lens of those Displaced

The final section of this chapter looks at the experience of displacement as described by the displaced people and their attempts to represent that condition visually. While the official archive used the photographic medium to represent/document India's forward march towards development, there were also several contradictory uses of photography by different constituencies. One of these is the use of photographs as markers of the loss and as carriers of nostalgia for life before the Dam construction. This 'sentimental function' of photographs destabilizes the objective logical terrain of official Dam photographs discussed earlier in the chapter. [529]

The BCB was financed entirely by the Union Government and include representatives from Punjab, Patiala and the East Punjab States Union, Rajasthan, Bilaspur, and Himachal Pradesh. While the irrigation and power benefits are divided among several states such as Punjab, Rajasthan and Haryana, the price of displacement was borne largely by the state of Himachal Pradesh (specifically Bilaspur) which lost 27869 acres of land for the Dam construction. One of the most talked about losses has been the submerging of the old Bilaspur town, called *Naggar.* Shakti Singh Chandel's book *Kehloor: Bilaspur through the Centuries* includes some photographs of the old Bilaspur town when it was submerged. These photographs are attributed to personal collections, and it is difficult to ascertain when they were taken. From what we know, in the first stage of the construction, while the Reservoir Level was below 1280 metres, lands were submerged only during floods in July-August-September each year.[530] Some of the photographs discussed below are probably from the early 1950s when the Dam construction was in progress and lands were submerged only for a few months of the year, resurfacing again after the floods.

Image 53 is a bird's eye view of Bilaspur town. This photograph was possibly taken from an elevated point on one of the neighbouring Shivalik hills. It is printed in black and white, and its composition horizontally divides the frame into two. The upper half shows the hills setting up a background for the town, which is seen in the bottom half of the frame. The image quality makes it difficult to visualise the demolition that the publisher wants the viewer to see. However, the caption does the job, establishing 'demolition' as the significant action captured in this photographic narrative. Pirta and his team conducted a study in applied psychology with displaced residents of Bilaspur town to understand the

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[529] Sekula distinguishes sentimental realism and instrumental realism in Sekula, 'The Traffic in Photographs,' 16.

[530] Choudhary, *Dr. Rajendra Prasad*, 491.

memories that a photographic cue could recall. The researchers used the same photograph and found that the "photograph of the old town of Bilaspur… elicited a greater number of memories related to lost home" compared to recall without a photograph. This research draws on Bowlby's Theory of Attachment to suggest that humans have a natural attachment to spaces as a survival strategy.[531] Pirta's work further argues that "unwilling separation from secure habitats of human living (can) cause long-term changes in cognitive schemata of memory". Referring to the case of those displaced by the Bhakra Dam, Pirta concurs that the pain of separation is still alive even after fifty years[532] and lingers in the memory as a nostalgia for a lost space, channelled through a photograph.[533]

Bilaspur town under demolish
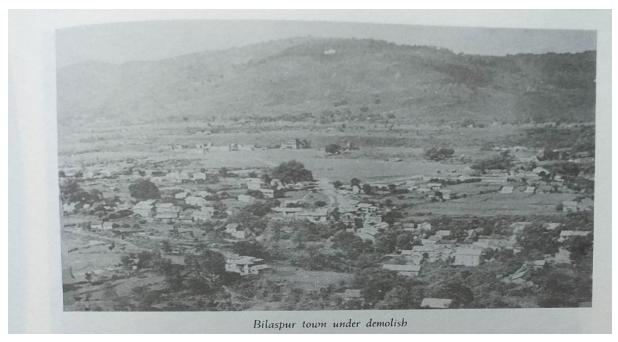
Image 53: 'Bilaspur Town Under Demolish (sic)', photograph, *Bilaspur Through the Centuries*, Urvashi Books, 2007.

French historian Le Goff points out that history writing attempts to establish commemorative dates, after which the archives are "manipulated to delete the massacres and executions of the Terror" from popular memory.[534] The official archive does a similar job of establishing a celebrated narrative of the

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[531] Pirta draws on Bowlby's theory of attachment. Ibid.

[532] Pirta, Chandel, and Pirta, 'Memories about Loss of Home among the Resettlers of Bhakra Dam, Western Himalayas', 192.

[533] Ibid. 188-89.

[534] Bate, 'The Memory of Photography', 246 drawing on Le Goff, *History and Memory, 87*.

Dam building, replete with factual notes on important dates and visits to the construction site. While doing so, it wipes off the human cost that accompanied this mammoth modernising edifice. The memory elicited by a photograph such as the one above points not to a 'truth' but acts as evidence of 'incompleteness' of the official archive,[535] of a painful experience, a struggle, a dissonance that the state's narrative attempts to gloss over.

The turn to memory in history writing has helped to break the traditional ways of structuring knowledge.[536] It has brought in a renewed investment in objects linked to personal memory as an antidote to the silences of the traditional archives. In such a context, photographs become valued objects tangled with meaning and affect, highlighting the impossibility of truth claims, and are charged with the task of filling the holes of history.[537] Memory work attempts to recognise the proliferation of meanings rather than a shutting down of truth entirely[538]. Also useful in this context is Pierre Nora's reminder of the 'archival' nature of modern memory: "It relies entirely on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image"[539]. A photograph such as the one above is a material trace where the displaced person's memory is triggered as shown by Pirta's study. In the process, this photograph with the memory it enlivens, pierces the carefully guarded official archive and highlights the complex nature of retelling the past.

The past is not just about what is remembered, but also about what has been forgotten and the attempts to resist forgetting through memorialising. This photograph of the Old Bilaspur town that was demolished is more than a representation of a town that existed before its submerging. It is a living trace of the lost ways of being and *seeing* before the Dam was built. The imagination of death is a constant parallel in visualising the Old Town. Barthes famously drew the associative link between photography and death. Photography here, is not merely a device for remembering what once existed, but also a haunting reminder of the loss of what once was. Derrida has also expanded on this in his work *Archive Fever* reminding us that anxiety about memory is essentially a "destruction drive", suggestive "of loss" and death.[540] Similar elements of death and decay can be observed in these images. These photographs

[535] A Kuhn, 'Photography and Cultural Memory: A Methodological Exploration', 284.

[536] For an account of this turn to memory studies, Radstone, *The Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory*.

[537] Drawing on Sturken, *Tangled Memories*.

[538] Cross and Peck, 'Special Issue on Photography, Archive and Memory', 130.

[539] Nora, 'Between Memory and History', 13.

[540] Ibid., 9.

remain the only available material trace of these older structures. Such photographic remembrance institutes a resistance against forgetting. Its value is constituted not just from what is shown within the frame, but from its presence as the material remains of what is no longer visible in the surrounding landscape. Photography, in this case, is no longer a substitute for reality, but a living mark of loss and nostalgia.

Shakti Singh Chandel notes the experience of those displaced in Old Bilaspur town. "By 1959, as the Dam was nearing completion, the water level had started rising inch by inch and the Oustees were witnessing their homes, villages and centuries-old towns vanishing into the depths of Bhakra Lake.*"[541]* Poet Vimal Krishan Ashk's poetry '*Yeh kin logo ki basti hai''*/ *Whose settlement is this?* is written from the perspective of an 'Oustee' who was evicted from his town and given replacement land in another area.[542] The poet laments that the new neighbours and new surroundings can never replace their ancestral land and their kin and friend who lived next door. While the immediate and visceral impact of the displacement was the loss of land, a sense of nostalgia was also deeply experienced. The poet articulates this by drawing up memories of swinging on the *peepal* trees and expresses anguish over the loss of "familiar grains, familiar spices and familiar sky". Elizabeth Edwards notes that the past can be understood not just through the place and locale, but through the "spirit of being born in the environment."[543] The new settlement was accompanied by a feeling of uncertainty, of their lives turned upside down and being rendered rootless refugees in their own country. In the last verse, the poet remarks, '*Is sheher ka paani khata hai, is sheher ki dhoop julusti hai/ this city's water eats us up and this city's light burns us.'* The use of the words water and light are a poignant reference to the Dam project which was in effect an irrigation project and publicised as a solution to North India's power crisis. Expressions of loss and anguish such as these direct us to the experience of development at the local level. While the lengthy public records remind us of the success of the Bhakra-Nangal Dam in taming nature for the benefit of the nation, popular accounts such as these remind us of the human cost of mega development projects. The State centred top-down perspective highlighted by the BBMB archive visualises only the promise of 'progress', quietly but firmly negating the lived experiences of

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[541] In the absence of substantial records of what was lost, Chandel's description of the loss of ninety-nine temples, eleven gardens, local vegetation, birds and trees is important to understand the intensity of the loss, Chandel, *Bilaspur through the Centuries*, 367. Recently a book of poems and short stories was published, drawing on memories of the old town. Singha, *A Town under the Lake*.

[542] Vimal Krishan Ashk was a lecturer of English at the Government Degree College when the poem was written, Bilaspur. Chandel, 380.

[543] E Edwards, *The Camera as Historian*, 130.

people whose lives were permanently altered by the displacement. It holds no space for the trauma and pain of those who experienced this forceful push of state-led development first-hand.[544]

Chandel's book also published some close-up photographs of the old monuments in Bilaspur town after they were demolished. Image 54 is a series of three photographs, collectively captioned 'palace in ruin'. The photograph on the top shows the new Anand Mahal Palace built in 1938 surrounded by water. The photographer has effectively captured the palace from a distance visualising its reflection in the water around. The other two photographs show parts of the palace in close-up. These three photographs depict symbolic destruction of Bilaspur's monarchical glory after India became a Republic. The princely state of Bilaspur acceded into the Indian dominion in 1948. When the Constitution of India was adopted in 1950, Bilaspur was specified as a Part C State in the First Schedule of the Constitution.[545] In 1954, Bilaspur was officially integrated with Himachal Pradesh to form the Union territory of Himachal Pradesh. Being a Union Territory meant limited powers under the direct rule of the central government. This continued until 1970 when Himachal Pradesh achieved full statehood. From 1948 onwards, a thriving monarchy in Bilaspur gradually transferred powers to the postcolonial nation-state. Like many other princely states that were acceded into the Indian Dominion between 1947-1950, the transition of power in Bilaspur was chaotic. While Raja Anand Chand and his monarchical family had their reservations and demands, our focus here is more on the experience of these tumultuous years of the local population, who were expected to be silent spectators to the post-independent annexation drama. The composition of these photographs implies an active use of the photographic medium to document this transition process. For instance, Image 54 is consciously framed with rippling water in the foreground giving visual evidence of the water burial underway. The photographer has actively used water as a compositional device, effectively highlighting the texture of liquid in the frame to create evidence of the submergence.

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[544] The official narrative reframes displacement as a 'management' problem that can be negotiated by giving land for land (however, often even that did not happen). It occludes the question of life and spirit, which is the crux of a society's development. Referring to several files on the discussion of Bhakra Oustee rehabilitation at the NAI.

[545] The Constitution declared India a 'Union of States' with three main types of States: Part A states included nine former governors' provinces of British India, Part B states included eight former princely states and Part C states included ten former chief commissioners' provinces and some princely states, one of which was Bilaspur. https://www.deccanherald.com/special-features/revisiting-journey-29-states-701021.html accessed on 29th January 2021.
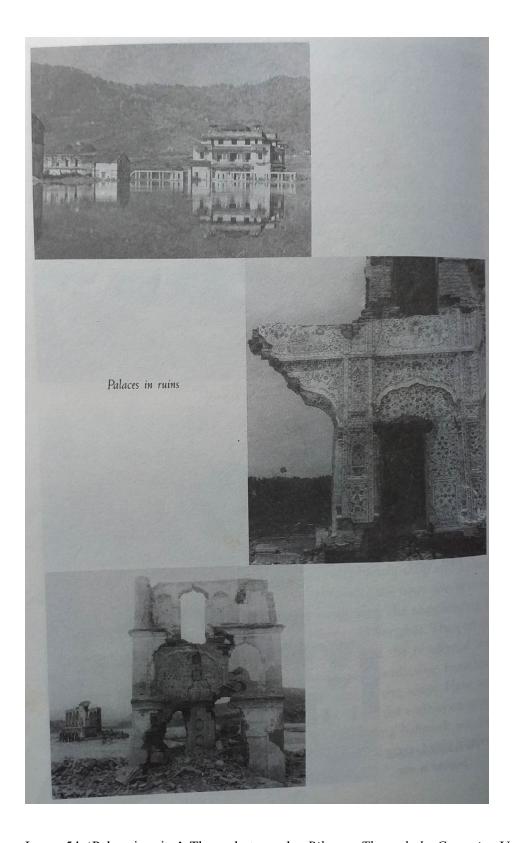
Image 54: 'Palace in ruins', Three photographs, *Bilaspur Through the Centuries*, Urvashi Books, 2007.

Centuries-old temples in ruins
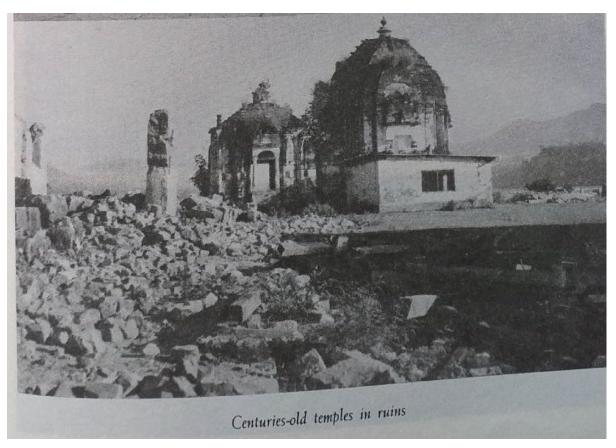
Image 55: 'Centuries-old temples in ruins', photograph, *Bilaspur Through the Centuries*, Urvashi Books, 2007.

Image 55 further underlines the themes of decay and deliberate neglect, revealing an attempt at framing the Dam narrative through rubbles and destruction. In the Introduction of this dissertation, we have discussed 'chaos' in Partition imagery, which can be seen as an aesthetic form that counters the linearity of the postcolonial state vision. The rubbles and ruins produced as a result of Dam-induced displacement can also be seen as another form that counters the linear progressive logic of the nation-state. Taken from the ground level, Image 55 captures the temples in the distance through rubble and stones that take up half of the frame. These sharply focussed stones and gravel define the image and effectively frame the temple at the back as a ruin making this image a story of ruins and losses.

As mentioned earlier, in the initial stages of the Dam construction, the submerged structures were visible to the public eye after the floods receded in September every year. Deformed by the onslaught of Sutlej waters, the ruins visible after September were tragic reminders of the town's ongoing water burial. For the locals, witnessing the older structures progressively decaying every year was a deeply painful experience. Ashk's poem *Sandu Ground* highlights the personal associations of these monuments and the gravity of their loss. He laments the disappearance of 'familiar temple doors which knew its visitors'

which were drowned to death in the 'blue waters of Sutlej'[546]. For the locals, their sense of pre-independence identity was connected to these local sites and seeing them submerge slowly in Sutlej was a painful process of transition.[547] Besides their sentimental function, the persistence of such compositional choices in several photographs also suggests a conscious use of photography to create a parallel narrative of the Bhakra Dam. Even though the photographers remain anonymous to us, their framing and compositional choices suggest an experience of loss and dissatisfaction with the state narrative of Dam induced development. At a time when the official archive is replete with images of Dam construction trumpeting the popular progress rhetoric, photographing ruins as a compositional choice is emblematic of the fragmented optics of postcolonial Development**.**

Further, in a period of massive political upheaval, these photographs bring open the fractured nature of belonging and citizenship in the immediate years after colonial rule. Uncovering the histories told through these photographs also hints toward the contestations between national citizenship and local belonging. Let us see one photo that depicts this.

Image 56 depicts a distant overview of the Sandhu ground fenced all along. The ground was associated with the princely heritage of Bilaspur and was often used as a landing space for small aircraft in the 1940s.[548] There are many people in the frame suggesting that this photograph was possibly taken while an important event was being hosted on the ground. The presence of the fence and people peeping from outside suggests that access to this ground was possibly restricted for this event. The tent in the photograph could be for a famous personality, possibly the king of Bilaspur who could have been present at a guarded, but well-attended event.

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[546] Chandel, *Bilaspur*, 379.

[547] Elizabeth Edwards has written about the evidentiary value of a place that is connected to the localised sense of identity. On the association of monument photographs and local identity, E Edwards, *The Camera as Historian*, 123–162.

[548] Using the description of Sandhu Maidan on https://hillpost.in/2017/11/broken-heritage/109648/ accessed on January 30, 2021.

A view of Sandhu Maidan
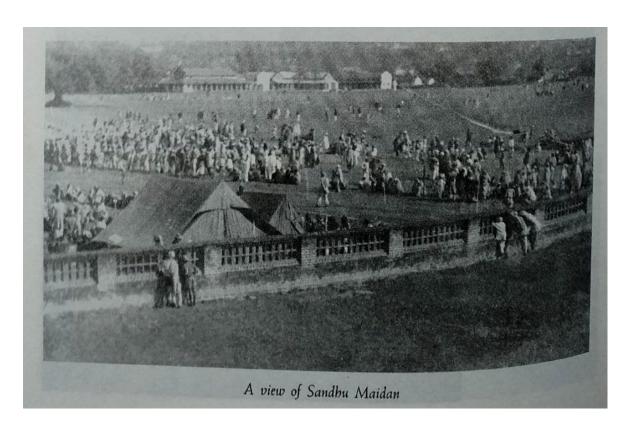
Image 56: 'A view of Sandhu Maidan', photograph, *Bilaspur Through the Centuries*, Urvashi Books, 2007.

Ashk wrote a poem titled *The Sandhu Ground* in 1959 that wistfully recounts the 'burden of memories' left after the town submerges in water. From the tense of the poem, it appears that it was written just before the ground was flooded, underlying the painful anticipation of the death of the land. In a very vivid description, the poet recounts the bricks of the buildings which carry many stories, doors which know the visitors closely, the birds and the *peepal* tree which have grown off the land, each of which will be drowned in the waters of Sutlej. Interestingly the poem does not directly refer to the Sandhu ground but makes references to 'life before' through the titular metaphor of the ground. The connection of this ground with the princely life of Bilaspur makes it a symbol of the political reach and impact of the local monarchy which was curtailed by the postcolonial Indian state. The anguish about the disappearance of the ground and monuments connected to the local monarchy can be seen as a painful farewell to the old political institution of monarchy. Although the Dominion of India signed an agreement in August 1948 with Raja Anand Chand to administer Bilaspur as a separate unit. This agreement was bypassed in 1954 when Bilaspur was merged with Himachal Pradesh despite resistance from the inhabitants.[549]

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[549] In a continuation of his monarchical popularity and privileges in postcolonial India, Anand Chand served as a Member of the Constituent Assembly (1947- 1948), in the First Lok Sabha (1952-1957)

Elizabeth Edwards notes that photographs of old monuments become fluid sites where the local identity is experienced, longed for, and articulated in contestation with national imaginations. A simple photograph evolves into an emotionally charged sense of place, a sentiment, and a sense of belonging that is tied to the local site. In this case, since the local place no longer exists, it is the photograph which contains the 'material trace' of the place lost to Sutlej waters. The photographic space recreates the past (life under princely rule depicted through Sandhu ground), which is very much a part of the new present (post-1947 India). The photograph becomes important in its role as a treasurer of a shared history, articulating local trajectories of belonging, maintaining an often ambiguous and confused relationship with the national[550]. The locals of Bilaspur were not only an imagined community,[551] but also shared a feeling, in Appadurai words, a "community of sentiment", a group that begins to imagine and feel things together.[552] This photograph of the Sandhu maidan was a part of not just local knowledge, but also "local sentiment",[553] a sentiment of collective loss during the transition years.

Interestingly, while Chandel's account does not go beyond expressing the loss of its royal monuments,[554] the poems do incorporate an openness towards embracing change and acknowledge the relevance of the new Indian state. Towards the end of Ashk's poem, the writer shifts his tone from pain and agony to a longing to serve the Indian nation through making a sacrifice. The poems reveal a more contested space where the agony over the loss of home exists alongside a longing to be a part of the nation-building process, where nostalgia and ambition are experienced together. Pandit Dina Nath's words from his poem *Bilaspur* (1958) reflect the sense of sacrifice that was integrated with the pain of losing one's ancestral land. His lines "India's dream fulfilled…oh nation, my land is sacrificed for you…the water of Sutlej is rising.*"*[555] convey the pain and desire of giving up local roots for establishing a connection with the new nation. A similar sentiment was also echoed by Nandlal Sharma when I interviewed him. When asked about why they agreed to give up their land in the first place, he said that it was the first time that independent India was displacing people for developmental projects. "We

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representing Bilaspur and in the Rajya Sabha from Himachal Pradesh (1958-1964) and Bihar (1965-1970). He was also elected as a member of the state assembly from Bilaspur (1977-1982).

[550] E Edwards, *The Camera as Historian*, 123–62.

[551] Used the phrase popularised in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities.*

[552] E Edwards, *The Camera as Historian*, 128.

[553] Ibid.

[554] Chandel's affinity for the royal family of Kahloor and his links with the RSS may be the reason for his book to singularly harp on the loss.

[555] Chandel, *Bilaspur*, 379.

believed in the promise of a new country…we believed it was our duty to sacrifice in the service of the nation… at that time, we were not aware of the impact of displacement and the futility of the resettlement and compensation claims."[556]

The photographs of loss and ruins then can be read as a wistful longing for what is disappearing but simultaneously as an attempt to connect to the story of development, offering a sacrifice of land and life in the spirit of nation-building. For a generation that grew up rooted in its local political alliances and networks, it must have been a conflicting experience to give up the regional loyalties in favour of the new nation and its centralised leadership. This tension between regional and national loyalties was an integral experience after Independence. The official archive displays the Bhakra Dam site as a cohesive national space as it tries to project the new nation-state as involved in nation-building activities as well as the protector, manager, and rescuer when there are interruptions (such as the 1959 mishap). Through curated optics of development, the postcolonial nation-state projects itself as the *obvious* successor to colonial rule. However, in reality, these processes were conflicted and ambiguous. There was a stiff contestation between the autonomy of princely states and the new state trying to establish itself as the sole centralised authority of postcolonial India, resulting in a fragmented and often confused notion of belonging for the people. The projected harmony of developmental optics was persistently contested by the optics of displacement and ruins. The photographs of the areas submerged in the reservoir convey a dualistic sentiment – a pain for the lost past and a longing for a promised future.

Displacement brought in a sense of being uprooted, but also an optimistic possibility of change, anchoring in the promise of citizenship in the new nation.[557] Unfortunately, the passage of time revealed that a one-time surrender and monetary compensation for a perpetual loss of land, forest and other resources, culture and identity linked to the land was an unequal bargain. In the name of 'sacrifice' for the new nation, the residents of Bilaspur and surrounding villages were made to give up much more than just some acres of land. In the years after, it has become clear that the Oustees were not given what they were promised and there are accounts of the displaced people feeling neglected while those in power claimed the mythical bounty of development.[558]

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[556] In-person interview with Nandlal Sharma, January 2019.

[557] Recently, Daniel Haines has noted the political processes at Bhakra-Nangal that integrated the 'subjects of an empire into citizens of the postcolonial state'. Haines, 'Development, Citizenship, and the Bhakra–Nangal Dams in Postcolonial India, 1948–1952'.

[558] The Oustees have been fighting legal battles for their grant of land in place of the land they gave up for the Dam. In 1971 the HP government formulated Resettlement and Rehabilitation scheme for Bhakra In 2019, an approximate number of 363 families are still waiting for the enforcement of the scheme. The case of people displaced by the Bhakra Dam has been one of the first instances of dam-related

In some ways, the photographs in the official archive and those of the ruins of Old Bilaspur town exist as corollaries, simultaneously representing the exigencies and negotiations of loss and hope. It conveys the ambiguities of the present for a population oscillating between the last allegiances and futuristic aspirations, highlighting the experience of living through the first decade after independence. The photographs of ruins perform a sentimental function serving as reminders of what has been lost. At the same time, they trigger memories of the sacrifice made in the name of the new nation. The construction photographs from the official archive serve a documentary function highlighting the glory of the modernist promise, simultaneously riling up a sentiment of dissatisfaction with how the future has been shaped and what has been lost in the guise of this futurist dream. Unlike the harmonious unity in diversity frame adopted by the official vision, the terms of belonging and citizenship for those stuck in between the local and national loyalties were uncertain and ambiguous.

The promise of development and linear progression seemed alluring to many in the decade of 1950s when several transitions were underway. Photography from this period is reflective of the fragmented aspirations towards change and newness that clashed with a painful restructuring of old loyalties and identities. The photography of ruins as discussed above suggests the anguish associated with a past that was slowly and painfully vanishing before their eyes. At the same time, the poetry and interviews also reveal the aspirations of those displaced. There was an impulse to move forward and embrace a new political identity as a part of the new nation. It is a tragedy then, that the political status of those who gave up their land for the Dam remained labelled as 'Oustees'. Their aspirations were denigrated as economic claims for resettlement and rehabilitation. The state with its impetus on nation-building activities failed to grant dignified citizenship status to people displaced by the dream of development. Their status sadly remained suspended between their nostalgia for the past and their dissatisfaction at being side-lined in the developmental future, delegitimising their status as citizens in a democratic nation. Reiterating Barthes in this context, a photograph of a lost time is simultaneously a reminder of death and the only space to keep it alive. A similar contradiction exists in the Oustee experiencing loss in a bid to become an active and alive member of the new nation. New terms of belonging were justified through sacrifice and loss. Similar themes of sacrifice, pride and martyrdom were a part of work conditions at Bhakra as we have discussed. Over time, the promise of development began to fade away and displacement became a real political issue. The idea of martyrdom was slowly erased, leaving behind only the scars of an untimely and unwilling death.

displacement in India and has been used as a reference for several other development-induced displacement battles in later years.

4. 'Seeing' the State: Exploring the Optics of Nehruvian Postcolonial India Under the Trans-National Gaze

In the previous chapters, we have examined photography's role in the nation-building period by looking at the postcolonial from the inside. In this final chapter, we will be investigating the postcolonial state from the outside, as it was seen and constituted in interaction with a transnational lens. Given the period chosen for analysis, Nehru's ideology and persona have haunted this dissertation right from the start. In this chapter, we will draw him into the foreground and use this figure to explore the transnational optics that shaped postcolonial developmental aspirations.

The Cold War between the US and the USSR simmered in the 1950s as each country tried to extend its *sphere of influence*[559] and strengthen its hold on international politics. As a representative of newly independent India, Nehru, with his philosophy of non-alignment and *Panchsheel*[560] and his curious mix of socialist ideals while maintaining close ties with former colonial rulers,[561] was a particularly intriguing figure for both sides. The death of Stalin in 1953 marked the beginning of a change in the Soviet perspective on the geo-political role played by India. As discussed in chapter two, USAID pumped heavy finance into Indian rural development schemes in a bid to counter the penetration of communism in Indian villages, learning its lesson from what had transpired in China.[562] However, Nehru's intervention in the Korean War,[563] ensured his presence was taken seriously by the Soviet administration who saw him as capable of stepping out of the shadows of the Allied Powers.[564] In the preparation for the Bandung Conference in April 1955, Nehru emerged as a popular figure in the

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[559] For a recent re-assessment of the term in international relations, see Hast, *Spheres of Influence in International Relations*. Also, Etzioni, 'Spheres of Influence'; Resis, 'Spheres of Influence in Soviet Wartime Diplomacy'.

[560] Panchsheel refers to the five principles of coexistence, a set of principles to govern relations between nation states, codified into an agreement by India and China in 1954. Wood, 'Constructing an Alternative Regional Identity'.

[561] Tomlinson, 'Indo-British Relations in the Post-Colonial Era'.

[562] Zachariah, in his biography of Nehru, notes the CIA surveillance of Nehru's cabinet towards the late 1950s. Zachariah, *Nehru*, 235.

[563] India's passage of the resolution on neutral nations repatriation commission at the UN general assembly in the autumn of 1952 brought the Korean conflict to an end. For a discussion on the overlooking role played by India and Nehru's role in this resolution, Barnes, 'Between the Blocs'.

[564] As noted in references to Nehru in Khrushchev and Crankshaw, *Khrushchev Remembers*.

coalition of African and Asian ex-colonial countries. Beginning with his momentous visit to the USSR in June 1955, Indo-Soviet relations strengthened, and the Soviets began to see India as "one of their first non-communist" allies.[565]

Nehru's sixteen-day visit to USSR marked an important turning point in India-Soviet diplomatic relations and was a precursor to key bilateral exchange of technology and expertise between the two nations during the Cold War period. The visit was extensively covered by the Soviet and Foreign press. The State Fine Arts Publishing House in Moscow assembled photographs from the visit into an official commemorative album titled "Jawaharlal Nehru in the Soviet Union" which was given to the Prime Minister's Office, presumably for Nehru. This photographic album, a product of transnational optics, projected a blossoming diplomatic friendship between India and the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This visit and its repercussions were keenly observed by the Indian public, US, UK, and other interested spectators in the Cold War, making it a much-visibilised spectacle of the time.

The primary material in this chapter is a diplomatic album gifted to Nehru after his visit to the Soviet Union in 1955. The act of viewing photographs in an album is different from seeing them in isolation. The album, as a curated object, involves more than the framing and composition of individual photographs. The photographs are brought together to form a larger narrative, offering possibilities of personalisation for the author(s). Sylvia Borda notes that the album/book form has three main elements: it reflects the aesthetic position of the artist-author, it is a production and editorial process as it requires assembly and direction, and it acquires meaning as a whole, beyond the individual photographs it carries.[566] Much like archives, albums are collections marked by selectivity and choice. They are a "repository of memory" and an "instrument of social performance", as noted by Martha Langford.[567] In the light of this scholarship, the album in the discussion here will be assessed for its instrumental, aspirational and diplomatic role. Taking forward the discussion of photographic albums as gifts from chapter two, I will situate this album as a diplomatic gift within the broader scholarship on gift-giving in international diplomacy. I will also probe into the orchestration of visibility, and the construction and maintenance of symbolic and visual diplomatic protocols through this album. Going ahead, I will situate the production of this album within the fragmented viewing conditions that opened up during the Cold War, where the desire to be seen was often contradicted by a simultaneous apprehension of being seen.

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[565] Ralhan, *Jawaharlal Nehru Abroad*, 153.

[566] Wilkie, Carson, and Miller, *Photography and the Artist's Book*, 56.

[567] See Martha Langford's essay in Kuhn and McAllister, *Locating Memory*, 223.

This dialectic was often played out through the act of framing, which I argue, is simultaneously a diplomatic as well as a photographic act.

As a way of responding to the diplomatic claims of friendship made during Nehru's Soviet visit, the last section of this chapter, will briefly discuss another photographic album gifted to Nehru: Album 123, co-authored by three different Indonesian youth groups which articulated a diplomatic approach centred on obligation, reciprocity and solidarity rooted in shared anti-colonial struggles. The purpose of bringing this album into the discussion is to draw a contrast to our primary material – the Soviet album and complicate transnational viewing conditions. Unlike the Soviet album that reveals photography's employment in Cold War diplomacy, the Indonesian album suggests an attempt at remaking the world through anti-colonial solidarities and photography's presence within the same. The Indonesian album, as a counter-example, exposes global solidarity efforts beyond the Cold War discourse, thus clarifying the diplomatic character of the Soviet album by comparison.

A 1094. Jawaharlal Nehru In the Soviet Union: A Diplomatic Gift

Nehru visited the Soviet Union for the first time in 1927 for the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Soviet Revolution.[568] Soon after, he published his first book, a travelogue titled *Soviet Russia – Some Random Sketches and Impressions* which reflects his fascination with Soviet Russia: "… no one can deny the fascination of this strange Eurasian country of hammer and sickle, where workers and peasants sit on the thrones of the mighty and upset the best-laid schemes of mice and men."[569] June 1955 would mark his second visit to Russia, his first as the Indian Prime Minister. Nehru's admiration for the Soviet experiment had not died down, even when he acknowledged the lack of civil liberties in Russia.[570] On this trip, he was accompanied by his daughter Indira Gandhi (who travelled as his personal assistant) and other members of the official delegation on a sixteen-day visit that began with his landing in

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[568] Nehru visited the Soviet Union despite the colonial government's refusal to grant exit visas to those who attended the anniversary celebrations. Accessed from Nehru's First Visit to Soviet Union - Mainstream (mainstreamweekly.net) on February 18, 2022.

[569] Nehru, *Soviet Russia*, 2.

[570] From July 19, 1955. The Prime Minister's Visit to the Soviet Union and Other Countries (June-July 1955), File no. 1(3)/R&I/59. MEA, NAI, New Delhi.

Moscow on June 7th and ended on June 23rd with an emotional farewell speech proclaiming India-Soviet friendship.[571]
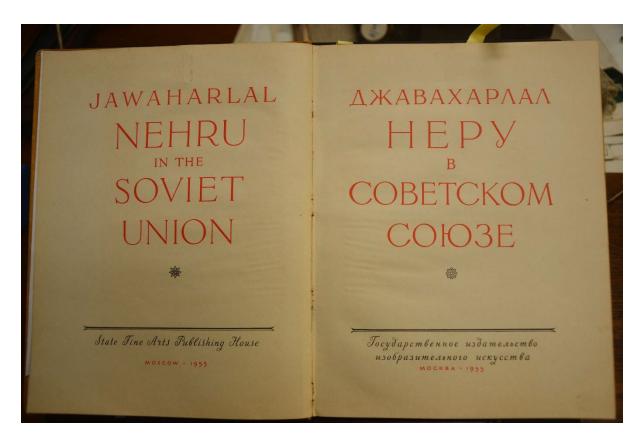
Image 57: Moscow State Fine Arts Publishing House, 'Jawaharlal Nehru in the Soviet Union', title-page of photo-album, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

The album *Jawaharlal Nehru in the Soviet Union* was assembled from the photographs after the visit and is a bilingual visual memoir with seventy printed and captioned black and white photographs, combined with a short textual introduction (in Russian and English). The album begins with arrival images from the Moscow Central airport establishing Nehru as the eagerly awaited guest from India. The viewer is then introduced to the crowds lining up on Moscow streets to receive him, as he and NA Bulganin, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, wave from open moving limousines. The photographs reveal various sightseeing occasions presented to Nehru on this visit, highlighting his presence as a curious guest and simultaneously portraying the Soviets as warm and hospitable hosts. There are also photographs of indoor gatherings, projecting Nehru as a negotiator and diplomat engaged

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[571] Despite several attempts to access the official file on this Visit at the National Archives in New Delhi, I haven't been successful. My request was returned with a Not Transferred (NT) reply.

in conversations with a receptive and friendly Soviet leadership, exchanging smiles and signing joint agreements. The album ends with joint photographs of Nehru and Bulganin at the airport, and Nehru bidding farewell to the crowd from the door of his plane.

Several photographs in this album were taken by TASS, the government-owned Russian news agency. Some have been accredited to individual photographers like Vasily Yegorov and Vladimir Savostyanov, who were possibly TASS photographers during this visit.[572] The album was assembled by the staff of the State Fine Arts Publishing House and possibly gifted to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as an official memoir of the visit. There are three copies or versions of the album: A 1094A, A 1094 and A 1093 in the NMML collection in New Delhi, each is a book size 11"x9", an exact replica of the other from the outside. On the inside, A 1094 A and A 1093 both contain seventy photographs each. They vary marginally in terms of how the photographs are numbered (Image 58). A 1094, on the other hand, includes several key differences, which we will explore shortly.

It is possible that the copies were made by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which received the album on Nehru's behalf, or by the archival team at the NMML, who received it later from the PMO.[573] The latter could have been a more believable theory since the NMML Photo section staff worked on cataloguing the photographs from this album, numbering them, and digitizing the photographs for research and exhibition purposes. However, this possibility falls flat when one looks closely at the three copies of the album in NMML's possession now. The copies vary slightly not only in their numbering, which seems obvious on first glance but also in the photographs used. Especially, A 1094 which has sixty-five images, five less than the other two, suggesting that three different copies were produced at the source. Why would a gift album, be made in multiple copies, each different from the other?

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[572] Some images from the visit, found in the album are also found on the Getty website. The names of the two photographers mentioned are from that site.

[573] The earliest catalogue entries I could find for this album in the NMML date back to 1991. There is not much information on its journey from 1955 to 1991. The staff suggest that the album may have been a part of Nehru's personal archive, transferred to the NMML archive in 1991.
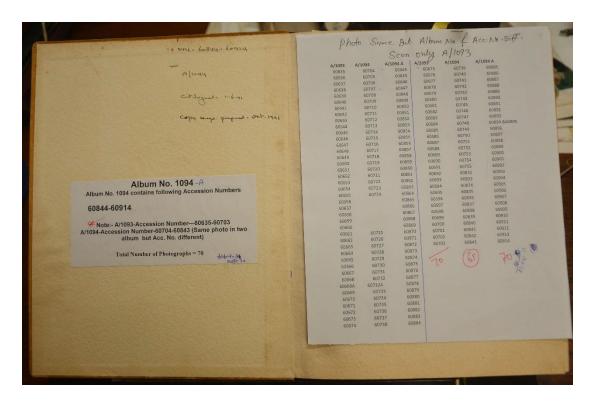
Image 58: Moscow State Fine Arts Publishing House, staff catalogue entries, photo-album, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

It is possible that A 1094 was the original version, while the other two were possibly extra copies or perhaps first edits. On June 19th, 1955, Nehru attended Leningrad's famous ballet *The Sleeping Beauty* in the evening. A photograph (Image 59) of Nehru talking to a group of ballet performers found in A 1094 A and A 1093 shows the figure of Indira on the left edge. Her gaze is directed out of the frame, away from Nehru's conversation with the ballerinas, picturing her as a distracted presence in the scene. A similar photograph is found in A 1094 at the exact same location in the album, with one difference (see Image 60). The frame has been adjusted, to crop out a distracted Indira, who was drawing the viewer's attention away from the image to a space beyond the frame. A reconfigured frame without the outward gaze of Indira to distract the viewer brings the focus back onto Nehru and his conversation with the ballerinas.

Image 59: Moscow State Fine Arts Publishing House, talking to ballet performers with Indira looking away, photograph, NML-60904, A 1094 A and A 1093, NMML, New Delhi.

Image 60: Moscow State Fine Arts Publishing House, 'untitled', with Indira cropped out, NML-60833 in A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

Costas Constantinou writes about framing as integral to diplomacy when he argues that "we see the world through representations which frame our experiences and label them as part of 'reality'". All diplomatic representations are in effect attempts to frame the situation such that each nation can negotiate for its own version of diplomatic 'reality'. There is duplicity at play here as not only the diplomatic situation is framed but the spectator's gaze is also framed to perceive the situation as a diplomatic encounter.[574] Constantinou expands the discussion on framing to suggest that art, representations, and diplomacy are all attempts at framing. Derrida's analysis of the truth of painting is useful here when he writes, "…what if the lack formed the frame of theory. Not its accident but its frame…". The act of "cutting out" of the frame, for Derrida, "is exemplary of the theoretical act itself."[575] Choosing what is cut out of the frame and what is chosen to be included is a diplomatic act in itself.

Several other small editorial differences exist in A 1094 compared to the other two albums. Some images are readjusted in size to make the album page spread look more aesthetically proportional. While some other images are removed entirely from A 1094 A and A 1093, as they were possibly just repetitions of a similar incident. For instance, on June 10th, Nehru visited the Moscow underground railway. A 1094 A and A 1093 both include two photographs devoted to Nehru and Indira's visit to the Moscow metro. However, A 1094 includes only one photograph on the Moscow metro. It also skips the rather generic stock photographs of the Bolshoi theatre and a scene from the famous ballet "Swan Lake". Curiously, though, this album does not include two photographs from Nehru's visit to Moscow University where he gave a lecture to university students (see Image 61). As we now know, this visit later became famous through Gorbachev's memoirs.[576] Gorbachev mentioned that as a young student at Moscow University he listened to Nehru's lecture and was deeply inspired by it.[577] The editors of the album clearly excluded an important event from the A 1093, an event that would be remembered retrospectively.

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[574] Constantinou, 'Diplomatic Representations... or Who Framed the Ambassadors?', 2–3.

[575] Constantinou refers to Derrida, see ibid, 13–14.

[576] Suhasini Haider, 'Nehru's Soviet sojourn,' The Hindu, November 17, 2021. Accessed on February 18, 2022, https://www.thehindu.com/features/magazine//article59843481.ece

[577] Sankalp Gurjar, 'Remembering Nehru's Visit To The Soviet Union in 1955,' *Eurasia Review*, July 4, 2015. Accessed on February 18, 2022, Remembering Nehru's Visit To Soviet Union In 1955 – OpEd – Eurasia Review
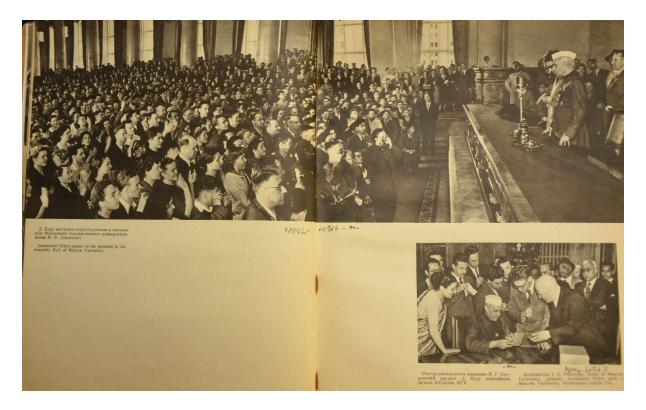
Image 61: Moscow State Fine Arts Publishing House, at Moscow University, NML-60866, A 1094 A and A 1093, NMML, New Delhi.

The conscious editorial choices about framing and proportions, which photographs should be included, and which could be left out, suggest that A 1094 was intended to be the finished version by the State Fine Arts Department at Moscow. Why were two additional 'raw' copies sent out to India then? Given the carefully constructed nature of the diplomatic exchange, it cannot be a mistake that two imperfect, unfinished versions accompanied the main gift album to India. Perhaps, this reveals something about how gifted photographic albums were interpreted in the transnational diplomatic context. Possibly, the two extra copies were sent so that the record of the visit was distributed to different official centres in India. It is also possible that more copies of the album do exist and were made with the intent of circulating the story of the visit. The possibilities are multiple, but what is significant here is to acknowledge that the photographic album, though gifted to Nehru was not a unique or a rare gift. Much like the photographic medium, the album as a gift attains its value by its mechanical reproduction. The two 'extra' copies and what is cropped out of A 1094 (referring to Image 59) reveal a diplomatic function. This album was not a singular gift, valued for its unique existence. The multiple rough-edit copies reveal the diplomatic life of this gift(s). Unfortunately, I have not been able to access the Russian language sources on this album as the pandemic restricted fieldwork. Therefore, I am unable to comment on the possible reasons for the State Fine Arts Publishing Agency to send three (or possibly more) copies to India. Nevertheless, its multiplied existence is enough to acknowledge the diplomatic intent of its production.

The 1955 Soviet visit was heavily publicised in India. A film made during Nehru's visit was shown across the nation, Menon notes in his diary.[578] Nehru's broad impression of the Soviet Union after the visit was of a country where "great changes [are] taking place" and a "new type of society" being built, a society that is progressively becoming more technical and scientific, that is not based on the profit motive.[579] However, he also acknowledged that the conditions in India were different from the conditions in the Soviet Union. Therefore, the path cannot be the exact same but "we can learn a great deal from the experiences of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia."[580] While we know about Nehru's reaction to the visit, it is difficult to estimate Nehru's response to the photographic album, or whether he even acknowledged it as a gift. Considering that gifts were often perceived as highly valued articles such as jewels, expensive metals, sculptures and art, it is not clear if Nehru saw photographic albums as gifts. The *Toshakhana* (India's official treasury) is in charge of valuing the gifts received by Indian Heads of State and other officials on their official foreign visits. However, the list of the items disclosed often mentions only "valuables" such as expensive tea sets, engraved books, exotic animals or rare metals, jewels, and textiles. Photographic albums, we can assume were possibly not registered in the *Toshakhana*, for their non-commercial value. The ubiquitous nature of photographic albums in the 1950s-60s ensured that they could not have been classified as rare or valuable gifts. Speaking of Nehru's own relationship with the gifts he received, a 1930s excerpt from Braj Mohan Vyas's writings suggests that Nehru was keen on exchanging the valuable gifts he received for cash that could be donated to anti-colonial struggles. After some convincing by Vyas, the Founder Chairman of Allahabad Museum, Nehru agreed to donate all the gifts he had received up until the 1930s to the Museum.[581] Given the sheer volume of valuable gifts received by Nehru during his term as the Prime Minister, it seems impossible that he could even keep a record of what was received. However, given the monumental nature of this visit, this album remains an important record of India's diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union in that period.

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[578] Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 131.

[579] Nehru and Longman*, The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN),* 283.

[580] Ibid.

[581] Braj Mohan Vyas, the Founder Chairman of the Allahabad Museum knew Nehru, who himself grew up in Allahabad. His anecdotes on Nehru's gifts have been recorded in *Mera Kachcha Chittha*, a section of which is translated in Braj Mohan Vyas, 'How Allahabad Museum got hold of gifts and artefacts from Nehru,' *National Herald*, November 13, 2019. Accessed on February 18, 2022, https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/how-allahabad-museum-got-hold-of-gifts-and-artefacts-from-nehru

Some recent work on material culture and performance studies challenges the predominance of the written word in the global history of diplomacy.[582] This approach also opposes the Eurocentric notion that diplomacy is represented by pieces of paper.[583] A focus on the optics of ambassadorial encounters can be useful in understanding the role of photography as a medium in the history of transnational diplomacy in the mid-twentieth century, instead of semiotically reducing the photographs to illustrations of diplomatic events. Photographs could present a less risky diplomatic gift than documents.[584] One possible reason for this could be the possible semantic openness of photographs. Rudolph reminds us that artefacts used in diplomatic exchange are often chosen for their "ambivalent nature and their genuine openness for different kinds of use" and for the ability to offer "different forms [and levels, my addition] of perception and interpretation".[585] Diplomatic practices are essentially "polysemic" as each side can view them as favourable to their perspective.[586] Photography, with its polysemic nature, presents an excellent space to blur the suspicion and mutual mistrust harboured between India and the Soviet Union in the Cold War context, allowing each side to participate in the staged nature of the visit. A 1094 as a diplomatic object, can be understood for its role in diplomatic negotiation, entangled in the aspirations and fears of both sides. Photography. through its very character, provides space for this diplomatic entangledness. The social is created or transformed not only through a human relationship with things, but in the way, humans "do things", thereby forming relationships with those objects, perhaps reinventing their relationships with those things.[587]

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[582] Rudolph and Metzig, *Material Culture in Modern Diplomacy from the 15th to the 20th Century*, 26.

[583] There is considerable German scholarship on the performative nature of state visits after 1945 in Germany. For a general reference, see Simone Derix, Bebilderte Politik. Staatsbesuche in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1990. (Göttingen 2009) Germany) Also, Dominik Geppert, Pressekriege. Öffentlichkeit und Diplomatie in den deutsch-britischen Beziehungen (1896–1912) (München 2007). I want to thank my friend Ajinkya Lele for his help with the German translations.

[584] Simone Direx notes the precision entailed in choosing the 'right' diplomatic gifts, focussing on objects that could be presented as less conflictual, and more neutral. See, Derix, 'Assembling Things Right. The Material Dimensions of West German Diplomacy (the 1950s to 1970s)'.

[585] Rudolph, 'Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices?', in *Material Culture in Modern Diplomacy from the 15th to the 20th century*, 26.

[586] Talbot, 'British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1807', 169.

[587] Ian Hodder argues that an "entanglement" between people and things is fundamental to social and cultural transformation. Reference from his interview *Entangled Discussions*, accessed on February 18, 2022,
http://www.kritischearchaeologie.de/repositorium/fka/Forum_Kritische_Archaeologie_2014_3_Reader_Hodder.pdf

Much research on the history of diplomacy has turned to questions of social and cultural practices and the meanings they hold in shaping relations between political entities.[588] There has also been considerable work on the 'cultural life of objects' and 'social biographies of things' which could be seen as a predecessor to our work here.[589] In the Indian context, Loomba records the emergence of colonial gifts to Mughal rulers as an attempt to secure trading privileges.[590] As financial situations strained by the 1770s, the British stopped participating in the Mughal gift giving traditions of khil'at and nazr, and instead replaced them with their tradition of giving image-gifts.[591] Dewan and Hutton have worked on the visual culture of state visits in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, exploring the presence of the photographic-visit albums within contested claims of sovereignty between the British and the local princely states in India.[592] Natasha Eaton has written about the centrality of the 'image-gift' in British-Mughal diplomatic interaction. The 'image-gift' introduced by the British to replace the Mughal gift tradition of *khil'at* (ruler's robes) and *nazr* (tribute money), was underpinned by a mimetic ideology of presence, unlike the Mughal ideology of the tribute-gift.[593] Irrespective of the changes in the nature, value, and symbolism of gift exchanges across periods, the centrality of gift giving in foreign policy communication cannot be ignored. However, while gift exchange could be motivated by tradition, the objective of diplomatic negotiation is significant.[594]

The photographs from the visit assembled in A 1094 are intended to bring forth the memory and experience of the visit retrospectively. However, building on Derrida, "memory inaugurates as much as it recalls or reproduces truth."[595] The photographs do not represent the visit, as much as they inaugurate a diplomatic negotiation between India and the Soviet Union, within the Cold War context. If we were

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[588] For reference on material culture studies, see Rudolph and Metzig, Material Culture in Modern Diplomacy from the 15th to the 20th Century; Buchli, *Material Culture*; Attfield, 'Material Culture in the Social World'.

[589] See, Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Biography of Things'; Appadurai, *The Social Life of Things.* For scholarship that studies objects as historical actants influencing social systems, Latour, 'Where Are the Missing Masses?'.

[590] Loomba, 'Of Gifts, Ambassadors, and Copy-cats: Diplomacy, Exchange, and Difference in Early Modern India'.

[591] Eaton, 'Between Mimesis and Alterity', 816–44.

[592] Dewan and Hutton, *Raja Deen Dayal*.

[593] Eaton, 'Between Mimesis and Alterity', 818.

[594] Rudolph, 'Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices?', 18.

[595] Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 100.

to use Harold Nicholson's definition of diplomacy as an "organised system of negotiation".[596] where communication and representation are necessary aspects, we can see that A 1094 fulfils both the requirements and proposes itself as a strong agent of diplomatic negotiation. In the following section, we look at the diplomatic aspect of A 1094 more closely.

Nehru-Bulganin Double-Portraits: The Optics of Indo-Soviet Diplomacy

Historically, gifts have also been significant facilitators of inter-state friendship.[597] Sahlins famously noted, "If friends make [give] gifts, gifts make friends".[598] This ability of diplomatic gifts to engender inter-state relations (friendship) is crucial for our analysis of A 1094. There was a diplomatic intent in the production of these albums, as noted earlier in our discussion on multiple copies of the same album. Simultaneously, A 1094 carried the potential to create diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union. The model (exemplar) of friendship is mostly understood as a "twosome" (usually men).[599] This figure of two, representing Nehru and Bulganin together, appears often in A 1094. I argue that the twosome of Nehru and Bulganin is a symbolic reference for Indo-Soviet diplomacy at work throughout the album. This section will analyse these Nehru-Bulganin double portraits in detail.

As already mentioned, the Soviet government had planned a boisterous welcome for Nehru and his party. Nehru, accompanied by his daughter Indira and N R Pillai, the Secretary General of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs landed in Moscow at 6.01 pm. To welcome them, Marshall Bulganin, the Soviet Prime Minister, Nikita Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, and Molotov, the Foreign Minister were present besides other members of the Cabinet. As we see from the successive pictures in the album, Indira was by her father's side throughout the ceremony, and so were

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[596] Rudolph, 'Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices?', 8.

[597] Talbot, 'British-Ottoman Relations, 1661-1807', 114. Gift-giving was a common practice in British and other European diplomatic relations in pre-modern times and there exists a vast scholarship on gift-giving within material culture studies, anthropology, and diplomacy studies. For a basic reference, N Z Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth-Century France*; Thoen, *Strategic Affection?;* Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving;* Jansson, 'Measured Reciprocity'.

[598] See, O'Neill's account of Sahlins's argument on the role of the gift economy in state practices of peace-keeping, in O'Neill, 'What Gives (with Derrida)?', 133.

[599] Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 78.

Khrushchev and Molotov. However, carefully framed, this photograph excludes these figures from the composition, defining it as a momentous meeting of two Heads of States of equal rank, which in turn refers to this moment as a meeting of two states, two friends – India and Russia.

This image, signalling the start of the visit, is a vertically framed full-length double portrait of Nehru and Bulganin. Although there are other people in the frame, their presence assimilates into the background as Nehru and Bulganin stand out. The photograph has been taken from an inclined angle that reveals the distance between these two central figures and the amorphous 'crowd' behind them. As is often the case with state visits, we can be sure that several photographers must have been present at the venue and the same image was possibly taken from several angles. However, the makers of A 1094 exercised decisive editorial control while choosing this particular point-of-view that allows Nehru and Bulganin to appear as distinct from the others, making this image a double portrait rather than a group picture.

The first double portrait in the album is a photograph of Nehru and Bulganin, taken at the Moscow Central airport soon after Nehru's arrival (Image 62). On June 7th, 1955, after spending two days in Prague, Nehru arrived in Moscow as a guest of the Soviet Government in a special Soviet "VIP" airliner.

Nehru is seen raising his hand in salute, while Bulganin seems rather listless and tired, looking out of the left edge of the frame, with a blank gaze. The disproportionate gap between Bulganin's figure and the edge of the photograph could be a hint that the photograph was cropped along the left margin possibly to remove an unwanted presence from the frame. Nehru himself does not return his gaze to this photographer, making this a rather mediocre record of a seemingly important moment in the visit. Among the many photographers present, perhaps none could get a more aesthetic shot of this moment, reminding us of the uncertainties of journalistic photography in the 1950s. The arrival address where Nehru and Bulganin posed together perhaps lasted only for a short time, producing a series of hazy or clumsy images, pushing the makers to pick the best of what was available.

While a few other photographs include Nehru and Bulganin in the frame, I expand only on those which can be defined as a diplomatic double portrait, consciously focussing on these two figures for the symbolism it portrays. These can be defined as those photographs where Nehru and Bulganin are the centre of the composition and have been consciously framed in a shared space, blocking out background details. As seen in this image, and other double portraits in this album, the frame is equally divided in terms of its focus. Nehru is not the sole centre, but they together occupy a shared centrality in the framing, referring to protocols of visual diplomacy followed by the album makers.
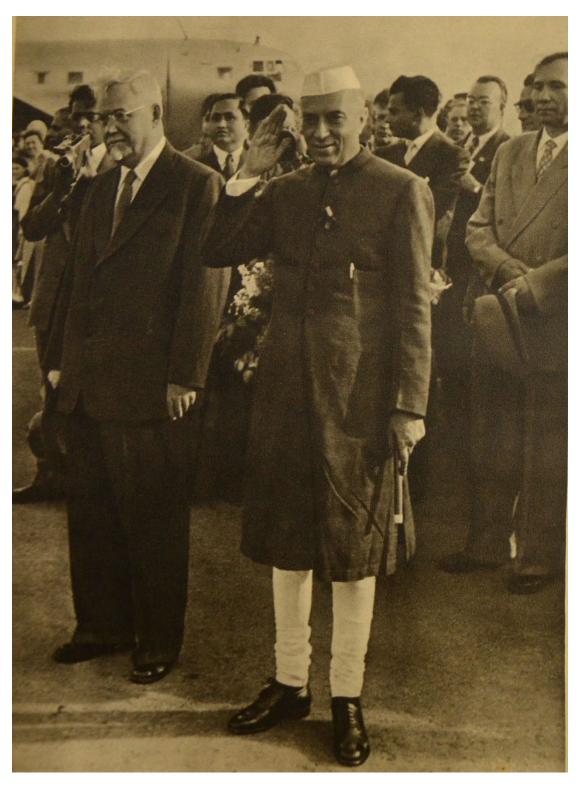
Image 62: State Fine Arts Publishing House, after arrival at Moscow airport, NML-60845, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

Nehru and Bulganin's shared centrality in the double portraits is made clear when we compare it with photographs of Nehru and Indira. Several pictures depict Indira sharing the compositional space with her father but none where her visual presence overwhelms Nehru's visual centrality. For instance, Image 63 is a photograph of the guests visiting the Stalingrad Tractor Plant. Nehru is again positioned in the centre of the frame surrounded by a group of Soviet officials showing him around the Plant. Indira is a part of the group, walking a little ahead of the rest, therefore clearly visible. The photograph shows her looking intently at the tractor models on display, marking her presence as an active part of the composition and not merely a detail of the group assemblage. However, her presence never competes with Nehru. He remains the focus throughout. Unlike the photographs with Bulganin, these photographs do not follow rules of shared centrality; Indira does not occupy an equal visual stature in the photographs, following the rules of diplomatic ranking.[600]

Image 63: State Fine Arts Publishing House, visiting Stalingrad Tractor Plant, NML-60873, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

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[600] Indira Gandhi accompanied her father on several official travels during Nehru's prime ministerial term, as his official hostess. In 1955, she also joined the working committee of the Congress Party.

Deepali Dewan writes of formalised group portraits in colonial India as "events that formalized relationship between two political entities"[601] where power hierarchies were represented through hierarchical seating positions in the images. The group photographs often showed the most important person in the centre surrounded by those of decreasing official rank, such that those closest to him in the hierarchy stood close to him, while those lower in ranking stood away from the central area of the frame. While this visit album contains no formalised group portrait with a hierarchical ranking system of the type that Dewan discusses, it does observe similar rules of hierarchy and ranking in the "caught-in-the-moment" photo-journalistic images such as this one. These photographs are also emblematic of a visual modernity that thrived on informality in portraiture.[602] Nehru, Bulganin, and Indira are often seen in informal poses rather than posing for the camera. However, despite their preference for informality, these portraits are governed by the rules of diplomatic hierarchy.

Image 64 captures a casual-looking Nehru leaning on the railing inside the Moscow Metro, while Indira curiously looks outside the window. The diplomatic entourage attending them in most other photographs seems to have been left out of this frame. Unlike any other photograph in the album, this captures Nehru and Indira in a rare moment away from the public glare and heightened attention that was the mark of this visit. This photograph depicts them more as *travellers*, absorbing new information with curious eyes and finding a moment of repose in an otherwise tightly scheduled itinerary.[603] This photograph is a rare occasion where Indira comes closest to sharing the focus in the frame. However, compositionally she is pictured as the dutiful daughter firmly beside her father's side, never disturbing or overwhelming Nehru's presence. Nehru, even while sharing his space, remains the older statesman and father figure. Indira's photographic presence is not allowed to overshadow Nehru's figure in the entire album.

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[601] Dewan and Hutton, *Raja Deen Dayal*, 122.

[602] Ibid., 131.

[603] The two-week visit was tightly scheduled. On June 10, Nehru met Bulganin in a two-hour long meeting at the Kremlin Palace, followed by an evening garden party hosted by K P Menon, the Indian Ambassador to Moscow. In between, Nehru visited the Moscow railway, saw an exhibition of Indian paintings at the Indian Art Gallery and met secondary school children. The day before, Nehru met President Voroshilov in the morning, attended a garden party at the British embassy in honour of the Queen's birthday, and visited the Moscow Agricultural exhibition and an aircraft factory. For a full itinerary, see Ralhan, *Jawaharlal Nehru Abroad*, 142–45.

Image 64: State Fine Arts Publishing House, in the Moscow metro, NML-60864, A 1094 A, NMML, Delhi.

However, there are exceptions to this hierarchical composition. Not only is the cultural value of the gift determined by who it is made for (Nehru, in this case) but the album is also important in the production of webs of diplomatic negotiation where nationalist impulses and political desires of the Cold War world are embedded within the social systems shaped by these hierarchies of social standing and diplomatic protocol. Having established the album makers' editorial attempts at maintaining diplomatic hierarchy and ranked presence through the photographs, I want to move on to the other double portraits in this album.
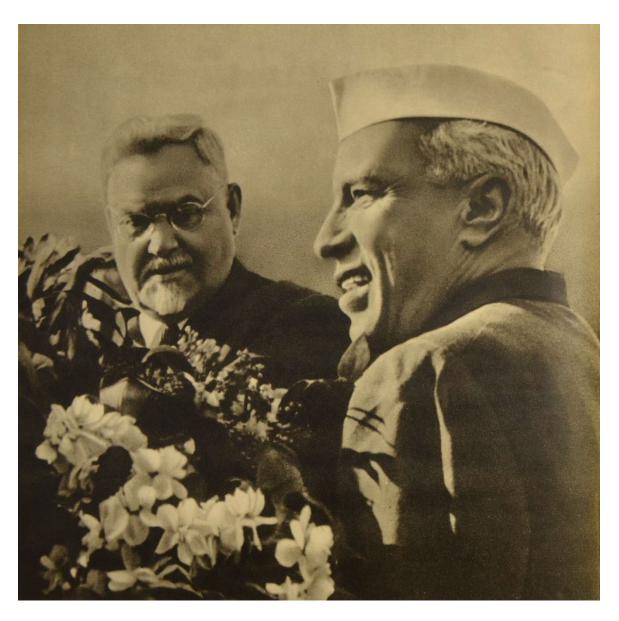
Image 65: State Fine Arts Publishing House. closeup after arrival, NML-60848, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

Bulganin's presence in receiving Nehru at the Moscow airport marks an important moment in Soviet international diplomacy. It was a gesture that symbolized the Soviet Union's eagerness to welcome the Indian prime Minister as one of the first non-communist leaders. In his official reception at the Kremlin Palace on June 9, the entire Council of Ministers were present, marking another first for any non-communist guest.[604] As mentioned earlier, the Soviet leaders looked at this visit as an opportunity to make an impression not only on the Indian people but also on the other uncommitted peoples of Asia and Africa - extending even to Europe. As for Nehru, this visit, on the eve of the Geneva Summit of 1955, allowed him to discuss international issues such as nuclear disarmament, atomic controls, and unification of Germany, with the Soviets, carving an international presence for himself and newly independent India. It can be said that this visit enabled Nehru to articulate a postcolonial, "pan-Asian voice"[605] internationally, aligning with his speech at the Bandung in April 1955. In terms of diplomatic gains, the visit paved a way for Soviet technical and financial support in heavy industry projects in India such as the Bhilai Steel Plant, among many others.[606]

The album gives adequate importance to this moment of meeting, an official start to a momentous visit, by introducing the viewer to a long full-length shot of Nehru and Bulganin together (Image 62), followed by them receiving a military guard of honour, next comes a photograph of Nehru giving a speech at the airport. These three photographs make up the arrival scene, before re-introducing us to Nehru and Bulganin's interaction by closing in on the moment of meeting. Looking at the Nehru and Bulganin close-up (Image 65) in more detail, Nehru and Bulganin are again seen sharing equal frame space. Nehru's face is presented in profile view facing Bulganin from the right edge, while Bulganin's face on the left, is straight towards the camera, but his gaze does not meet the lens. In the bottom left quarter of the page, there is a bouquet, placed at an angle that makes it difficult to accurately predict who of the two was holding it. This is a candid photograph, neither men look at the lens nor each other, instead they appear distracted by the situation around them.

To borrow from the scholarship on the politics of the close-up in Film studies, the function of the close-up in Soviet cinema was less about going closer to show details, but more about signifying, giving meaning, and designating significance.[607] In the Russian language, the term close-up signifies largeness,

[604] See, Menon, *The Flying Troika.*

[605] G K Reddy, 'Moscow Gives Mr. Nehru A Touching Send-Off: VISIT WAS SOVIET UNIONS FESTIVAL OF THE YEAR,' in *The Times of India*, June 24, 1955.

[606] For more, Mehrotra, India and the Soviet Union.

[607] Eisenstein, *Film Form*, 243.

or scale, as opposed to the English-language meaning of the word, as nearness or proximity. As Mary Ann Doanne points out, the close-up in the Soviet context is understood as a quality of the image and an extensiveness of scale suggesting an imposing stature. When the face is seen in a close-up, it is transformed into something larger than life. In Doanne's words, "the face, usually the mark of individuality, becomes tantamount to a theorem in its generalizability".[608] The face of Nehru stands for more than the physical presence of Nehru himself. The close-up of his face stands for the various roles outlined in multiple visual and textual discourses around the visit. It signifies the diplomatic traveller on a tightly scheduled itinerary, the diplomatic negotiator, and the 'crowd favourite' Nehru. It also signifies ideologies beyond the roles played by Nehru, such as Pan-Asianism,[609] Indian nationalism, his stand in the Korean war. Similarly, the face of Bulganin stands in for Soviet international policies after the death of Stalin, openness to non-communist allies and non-competitive coexistence. Their respective faces coming together in the close-up represents a moment of diplomatic exchange between India and the Soviet Union, resulting in the international recognition of the former as a formidable Asian postcolonial voice and the latter finally expanding its allies beyond the Communist world. Considering the Soviet authorship of this album, the closeup is also their projection of India as their ally. The US and USSR's interest in India during the Cold War is understandable. As discussed elsewhere in the dissertation, China's communist path made India a sought-after ally for both nations. For the Soviet Union, it was an opportunity to have another huge Asian nation join its ranks after China, strengthening the eastern bloc. India's unique history as an ex-colonial nation and the 'star' of Britain's empire, coupled with Nehru's popularity among the Afro-Asian leaders at Bandung, and his admiration for socialist ideals, made Nehru a significant figure for the Soviet leadership.

The Nehru and Bulganin close-up can be seen not only for its Cold War signification but also for dramatising this signification. An interesting reference to study the dramatic nature of this sign can also be drawn from the pictorial narrative vocabulary of scroll painting in India. One specific visual technique of relevance here is the "opening windows" technique, a common feature of Garoda storytellers of Gujarat. In the context of the story being told in the scroll, certain chosen episodes are highlighted in square or rectangular frames within the broad panel, as if "opening widows" on selected scenes.[610] The intent here is to identify this moment as that of heightened importance in the narrative structure of the story and spotlight the dramatic turn that the story takes after this point. Seen through this tradition of storytelling, the close-up in an album also functions like an episode narrated in an "open

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[608] Doane, 'The Close-Up', 93.

[609] Singh, 'From Delhi to Bandung'.

[610] Jain, 'The Art of Indian Picture Showmen'.

window". It emphasises the critical moment of the action, suggesting the reader take note of the beginning of Indo-Soviet friendship. It highlights a dramatic moment. Nehru and Bulganin's close-up faces surrounded by flowers magnifies the moment's dramatic impulse through a closely framed visual moment. It draws attention not just to the welcome episode but renders a generalised projection of all the other visual and anecdotal discourses that were to later emerge around Indo-Soviet friendship. The popular story suggests that Nehru and his party were received with flowers wherever they went during their visit. Often the people on the streets waiting to wave at Nehru would fling flowers onto the car until the vehicle had to be stopped and emptied to make room for more flower bouquets. Nehru, as Menon observed, seemed to be enjoying catching the vaulting bouquets of roses from his moving car. The security attendants who stood in front trying to ward off the "floral attacks" were often hit by one full in their face! Kuznetzov,[611] who was also accompanying the diplomatic entourage hurt his finger catching one of the flower bouquets. Menon remembers him saying "Today I have shed my blood in the cause of the Indo-Soviet friendship".[612] The symbolism of flowers is perhaps used to inaugurate the memory of Indo-Soviet friendship in the album.

As space is "used up"[613] by the faces of Nehru and Bulganin and the flowers, the moment is expanded at the expense of linear time. This close-up double portrait embodies a spirit of the 'performative'. Doanne borrows from Deleuze when she suggests that the close-up produces "an intense phenomenological experience of presence, and yet simultaneously, that deeply experienced entity becomes a sign, a text, a surface that demands to be read."[614] This presence built up by the close-up, breaks the representational value of what is seen and expands beyond its visual immediacy, becoming more than just a photographic record. It transforms into a multi-dimensional sign inaugurating the viewer's memory of the visit, while simultaneously performing diplomatic negotiations. This close-up double portrait becomes a sign of the much talked about bilateral friendship between Soviet and India in 1955. While the other Double Portraits in the album could be seen as semiotic representations of Indo-Soviet friendship, the close-up goes one step further and brings a theatrical form to the nature of the friendship, an attempt to exaggerate and draw attention through its exaggeration.

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[611] VV Kuznetzhov was the first deputy Foreign Minister of Russia in 1955

[612] Anecdote shared in Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 8.

[613] Doane, 'The Close-Up', 91.

[614] Ibid., 94.
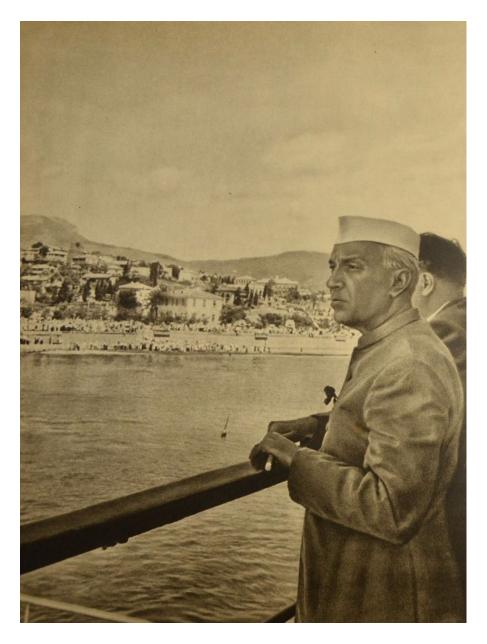
Image 66: State Fine Arts Publishing House. on the way to Yalta, NML-60879, A 1094 A, NMML, New Delhi.

On June 12, 1955, Nehru flew from Stalingrad to the capital of Ukraine, Simferopol, further driving to Alushta, a seaside resort. From Alushta, he boarded a yacht to Yalta on the Black Sea. He sailed for three hours along the scenic Pushkin Range, one that is known to have inspired the writings of the Russian literary giant, Pushkin. Image 66 portrays this sailing experience. Along the right margin, Nehru's towering figure takes up a third of the vertical frame. Two-thirds of the frame is occupied by the background landscape. Aesthetically divided between the sea and the mountain resorts, the landscape is an equally significant element in the image. While the rest of the album harps on Russia's manmade advances in industry, agriculture and the arts, this image is the only one that emphasises Russia's natural abundance. Nehru's face, however, is not directed at the mountain ranges in the

background. His gaze is directed outside the frame, over the waters as he seems lost in the beauty of the landscape. This was perhaps an aesthetic compromise by the album makers to present the scenic beauty of the Soviet lands while depicting Nehru in an identifiable semi-frontal pose. Nehru's face highlighted in the image is not the face of Nehru one has seen in myriad other photographs. The wrinkles on his face, the careful tonal balance of light and shadow on his cheek, and the detailed folds on his coat, all point to its airbrushed nature. In a photographic album, I argue that this image could be viewed as a fictional image -simultaneously a photograph and a painting, yet neither. Nehru did indeed sail on the yacht for three hours, as sources suggest. However, this image, instead of being a documented record of a moment from that sailing experience, could stand for the whole sailing experience. In doing so, the image moves away from its mimetic function and engenders an imaginative aspirational realm formalising the Soviet perspective of Nehru enjoying their scenery. The fictional attributes do not end just here. Over his shoulder, one can see the neck and shoulder of another figure. I want to argue that this shadowy presence could be read as a trace of Bulganin. While he was not present on the yacht that day, his presence is 'brought into' the image as a *shadow* - whose face is not seen, but through the back of his thick neck and his trademark coat. As an airbrushed image, its value lies in the aspirations it projects, an aspiration for Nehru and Bulganin to come together, and by extension advancing similar aspirations for India and the Soviet Union.

Diplomacy is a game of appearances, where each player in this diplomatic network is aware of the staged aspect of the process. In this context, a photographic album with staged or manipulated photographs does not stand out as an aberration. Rather, the photographic album becomes a diplomatic object by virtue of its participation in the staged nature of diplomacy. Shimazu argues that diplomacy is performative and symbolic.[615] By extension, this photographic album as a diplomatic object in exchange also plays a performative role, in its very production. The symbolic nature of the double portraits, the visual play of diplomatic hierarchy and the effortless insertion of fictional visuals in midst of a photo album, all together make up the photographic performative in the context of cold War diplomacy. Facticity and truth are not necessary valences here, instead, the album is measured by the experience it generates.

Building on Eaton's argument on the centrality of presence in the image gift, I want to see the fictional double portrait in the discussion here, through the experience of *presence* it transmits to the viewer. The function of Nehru and Bulganin's fictional image is to transmit the presence of Nehru and Bulganin, together sailing in the picturesque locales of Yalta. The actual absence of Bulganin from the yacht does

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[615] Shimazu, 'Diplomacy as Theatre'.

not matter. The aspirational presence of Nehru and Bulganin together admiring the natural beauty of the landscape, provide a symbolic anchor to the projections of Indo-Soviet friendship. This double portrait, much like the image-gifts Eaton talks about, conveys the "presence" of the absent reality through a "mediation of likeness".[616] This presence within the diplomatic context of this visit is rooted in the aspiration of bilateral diplomatic ties rather than what is present. This idea of the Soviet state projecting a presence anchored in an aspirational future connects back to our discussion (in chapters one, two and three) on the futuristic drive of the developmental modernist postcolonial Indian state and its yearning to craft an optics of desire and longing.

A fictional double portrait also opens up a space to see the staged realism of the visit, allowing the viewer to become alert to the performative aspects at work. Jennifer Nelson, while re-reading Holbein's *Ambassadors*, has drawn attention to the discrepancy and disharmony that is integral to that celebrated diplomatic painting. A focus on disharmony allows us to look beyond a singular perspective, and access multiple and often contradictory perspectives available in the image.[617] Drawing on her methodological insights, I want to investigate the multiple perspectives accessible through the staged/fictionalised images in this album. The staged nature of these images, I argue, must not be assessed for their truth value. Instead, accessing these images as staged/fictionalised opens up another perspective of viewing the images and the diplomatic setting. For instance, including a painting in a photographic album is an act of deliberate fictionalising, which encourages the viewer to interrogate the photo-journalistic element of the album. It is this deliberate staging that helps the viewer see through the constructed-ness of the image and the album, encouraging the viewer to move beyond the represented figure of Nehru (and Bulganin) to decode the theatricality of the sign-system at play throughout the album.

The theatrical nature of the double portrait is further heightened by the absence of any action in the image. Unlike several other photographs in the album, where Nehru is captured in midst of an action, such as greeting crowds, talking to Bulganin, visiting factories, giving speeches and so on, Image 66, similar to colonial image-gifts, shows Nehru (and Bulganin) standing as lone figures, in a quiet moment

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[616] Eaton, 'Between Mimesis and Alterity,' 816–44. In another essay, Eaton suggests a radical distinction between the Mughal ideas of presence and the colonial ideas of presence. Eaton, 'Coercion and the Gift', 269. I am trying to use her understanding of image as presence, to explore the element of an aspirational presence in the double portraits in this album.

[617] Nelson, *Disharmony of the Spheres.*

of contemplation without the presence of crowds.[618]This still and contemplative double portrait can be regarded as further evidence of the fictional construction of this frame. From the Soviet lens, it captures their aspiration to have Nehru (and India) as their supporter in the Cold War. Quite literally the image depicts Nehru fascinated by what he is seeing in the Soviet Union, with his politically powerful *friend* holding his back from the shadows (Bulganin, signifying Soviet Union's support- technical and political). The shadowy figure lurking behind Nehru makes sense when we look at this image through the prism of celebrated (male) friendships as an alibi for the friend/enemy duality lurking under the surface of the presumed friendship.

Diplomacy is "war by other means", Zhou En Lai famously reported.[619] If one were to read this statement as true, what are these 'other means' by which suspicion, mistrust and hostility are negotiated? Perhaps, through an appearance of calm, as A 1094 shows. Diplomacy has been regarded as a mode of negotiation, one that allows to prevent hostility or resist attempts to exert control.[620] In this space of negotiation, portraiture, as Eaton argues with reference to colonial portraiture, does exhibit a "strong desire" to do diplomatic work.[621] This chapter has argued that this desire extends to the postcolonial moment as well. As seen in the case of A 1094, double portraits of Nehru and Bulganin are engaged in the work of diplomatic negotiation. The Album's disconnectedness from the optical anxieties of the Cold War period, and its denial of hesitation and ambiguity in Indo-soviet relations on the ground, makes the photographic album a perfect diplomatic gift. It was meant to hide the real and portray a symbolic theatrical aspiration, in the Cold War context.

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[618] I am influenced by Natasha Eaton's analysis of the dichotomies between the 'in-action' nature of Mughal portraits and the solo seated static portraits of Warren Hasting. Eaton, 'Between Mimesis and Alterity', 822.

[619] As quoted in Saturday Evening Post (March 27, 1954), accessed on February 19, 2022, https://quotepark.com/quotes/1869661-zhou-enlai-all-diplomacy-is-a-continuation-of-war-by-other-me/.

[620] On the underlying hostility and rivalry within diplomacy, Langholtz, *The Psychology of Diplomacy*; Griffiths and Wesley, 'Taking Asia Seriously'.

[621] Eaton, 'Coercion and the Gift', 269.

Optical Vulnerability and a Complex Tale of Friendship: "Oh Friend! There is no Friend"[622]

This section will draw on the archival sources to investigate the nature of Indo-Soviet diplomatic optics in juxtaposition with the projections made in A 1094. The projection of Indo-Soviet friendship was a major hallmark of this visit. Nehru was received with slogans of "Long live Indo-Soviet Friendship; long live India's Prime Minister".[623] The album also ends with Nehru's words, "…Not only I, but the people of India as well, shall always remember it. I shall always value the warm friendship and hospitality accorded to me…". Nehru's reflection after the visit contends that "they (Soviet Union) value India's friendship".[624] At the same time, he also acknowledged that the popular welcome he received was "encouraged"[625] even though that awareness did not deter him from admiring Soviet friendliness towards him during the visit. K P Menon, India's Ambassador to Moscow recalls the 1955 visit by Nehru (and Bulganin's reciprocal visit in November that year) fondly, remarking "the people of India see in the Soviet Union, a friend -and a friend who, to all appearances, demands nothing from them except friendship."[626] However, shortly after the visit, two Soviet engineers requested a visit to the Kirloskar Plant to "get acquainted with the production and design of (…) pumps".[627] The request brought up ambiguities in terms of how the USSR was to be viewed.

A series of letters between the Plant authorities and the district magistrate reveals anxiety on how to view this request and whether the USSR can be regarded as a "potentially hostile foreign power". This discussion recorded in October 1955, only a few months after the much-publicised June 1955 visit reveals the uncertainties and gaps in the mighty declarations of friendship made by the Indian and Soviet

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[622] Derrida uses Aristotle's account to build his argument on the politics of friendship. I am referring to Aristotle's quote which is the starting point of Derrida's enquiry. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*.

[623] Ralhan, *Jawaharlal Nehru Abroad*, 141.

[624] Nehru and Longman, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, second series, volume 29, 280.

[625] Ibid.

[626] Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 131.

[627] Kirloskar Brothers Limited (KBL) manufactured agricultural equipment, diesel engines, electric motors, and centrifugal pumps in India since 1920. K BL, BL, 'Kirloskar Brothers Limited - A Leading Player in the World of Pumps'. File records at NAI suggest they received a letter from trade representatives of the USSR in India, requesting permission to send two engineers to visit their factory at Satara, in western India. Discussion in F 26 (112) – Eur/56, NAI, New Delhi.

authorities.[628] Despite the friendship and warmth conveyed by the A 1094, the ground realities reflect an ambiguity about how to perceive the USSR. A circular number C/sec/55 dated October 22, 1955, received from the District Magistrate of Sangli overseeing this request, notes that "all factories, firms connected with production, processing and distribution of iron and steel, coal, oil and other minerals" belong to the "security category" in order to prevent a potentially hostile foreign power "from obtaining such knowledge of the war potential of the country as can be gained by forming an estimate of its material resources". By withholding access to material that gives away the "war potential" of India to a "potentially hostile foreign power", the conversations reveal anxiety about India's position with the Soviet Union.

Friendship is a nebulous category. I want to use Derrida's work in *The Politics of Friendship*, to explore Indo-Soviet friendship as a mask for Cold War diplomacy. A certain contradiction exists within the very conception of a friend in a political context. Friendship espouses a silence, which Nietzsche refers to as "nothing sayable", interpreted by Derrida as: "Solitude is irremediable, and [therefore] friendship impossible".[629] Building on this, I situate the projection of Indo-Soviet friendship in the visit within the underlying anxieties and uncertainties that marked international politics and India's postcolonial situation. As mentioned elsewhere in the dissertation, partition induced territorial anxiety that was difficult to shake off. Even the Soviet Union, as Nehru himself remarked was battling a "war psychosis"[630] ever since the Russian Revolution and the mid-century experiences of War only amplified its mistrust. The Soviet Union, like the United States during the Cold War, attempted to extend its 'sphere of influence' by widening its list of allies, hoping to assuage some of its own insecurities and fears around war.

This anxiety within the Cold War context had an optical valence. The first on the list of information that is not to be shared with a potentially hostile nation is "photographs and plans and details of the building processes and equipment" which may "emphasize the more vulnerable parts of the undertaking and the precise position of the whole". Being photographed is an act of revealing to the all-seeing eye of the camera, allowing the camera to capture the nakedness of existence and to make oneself very

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[628] It is important to note that unlike the discussion on vulnerability outlined later in the chapter, this discussion happened before the 1962 War and therefore is suggestive of the political anxiety that was reflective of that period.

[629] While Nietzsche's observations are interpersonal, Derrida expands these arguments into a political realm. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 54.

[630] Nehru and Longman, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, second series, volume 29, 266.

vulnerable. Susan Sontag writes. "One is vulnerable to…photographic images in a way that one is not to the real thing".[631] Photography has a special impact, a power of sorts, to make the *seen* feel vulnerable. Photographic seeing transformed not only the way of seeing and engaging with reality.[632] It also affected the way one feels when seen as the subject of a photographic gaze.

The circular from October 22, 1955, also advises that "precaution be taken to ensure existing document plans and photographs giving vital information are kept in a reasonably safe place". It suggests discomfort with optical vulnerability, at the same time suggesting hiding/lying as a way of protecting against this threat of being seen by an untrusting gaze. After the visit of the Soviet engineers, a letter dated September 21, 1956, reports that "no photographs of any important installation were taken by them", reassuring the addressee that the optics were censored against any possible hostility. Interestingly, a group photograph identifying the visitors Isaav and Girenko with pen marks is attached with the report, suggesting the use of photographs to also guard against feelings of vulnerability. If at all they saw things which they were not supposed to see, the plant authorities would at least have photographs to identify them!

The desire to see and show was, very important to the 1955 visit. Nehru's desire to 'see' the changes in the landscape, culture, and industry of the Soviet Union,[633] was more than a tourist gaze. In 1955, India was on the verge of the Second Five Year Plan, which as we later know brought forth a strong socialist impulse to Indian planning and its trade with the eastern bloc of countries.[634] Nehru's fascinated eye gushes about the technical advance and the centrality of machines and construction in the lives of the Soviet population, as recorded in his reminiscences of the visit.[635]

The Soviet Union, on the other hand, performed their role as gracious hosts, by 'showing 'Nehru what he wanted to 'see'. The impulse to show can be located within the Cold War projections by the US and the USSR. It might be argued that the Soviets saw Nehru's visit as an opportunity for self-presentation in this Cold War atmosphere of intense scrutiny and suspicion. While this album was privy to Nehru and the PMO, the visit generated a curious, and possibly alarmed, the audience in the US and its western

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[631] Sontag, *On Photography*, 132.

[632] On 'Photographic Seeing' as a new way of seeing and performing, Ibid., 68.

[633] Nehru and Longman, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, 270-83.

[634] Rosario, 'India's Trade with the Socialist Bloc'.

[635] Nehru and Longman, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, 275–77.

allies. The US gaze on this visit is especially an intrinsic part of how it was staged and how the photographs around the visit were created. Von Welck saw state visits in West Germany as a significant projection against the Soviet offensive in developing countries.[636] Inverting that logic, a state visit by an ex-colonial developing country like India to the USSR was also a significant step for the Soviet Union against the US in the Cold War. India, we know, was a significant player for both sides, being the Asian giant in terms of population and land mass, with close ties with Britain, having been its 'jewel in the crown' and was helmed by Nehru who was himself enthusiastic about the socialist ideology. After China turned communist, the US saw India as an opportunity in Asia and spent money and political attention on getting India on its side (as we discussed in chapter two). It is not hard to guess therefore that every aspect of this momentous visit was closely watched by the US officials.[637]

The politics of visibility was an essential aspect of Cold War politics, as Simone Direx argues with reference to Germany after the War. States increasingly observed and scrutinised each other's behaviour and ideological alignment through mass media images.[638] Visibility was orchestrated through mass media images such that the visitor's fear of being photographed or filmed doing certain actions or visiting certain sites in host nations, outweighed their resistance to those actions themselves.[639] In the context of the Federal Republic of Germany, Direx suggests a conscious use of visualisation strategies in state visits after the War.[640] Building upon her claim, I want to explore the visualisation of this visit as a significantly scripted element of the Cold War exchange between India and the Soviet Union.[641] It

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[636] Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 120.

[637] Besides, India was closely watched by different nations in what was quickly becoming a world where each nation had its eye on the other. An example can be seen in the 1955 British Pathe documentary reel, *Bulganin in India* (November 1955). The video shows scenes of popular welcome for Bulganin and banners proclaiming Indo-Soviet friendship as the narrative voice expresses 'concern' about the growing proximity between India and the Soviets. Accessed on 27 November 2021 on https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ApWkI9kG-J0&ab_channel=BritishPath%C3%A9. More work needs to be done on the imagination of India under the transnational gaze. For a quick reference, there is a recent scholarship on the image of India in the GDR. Reyazul Haque's essay on the production of images of India in GDR Newsreels, in Bajpai, *Cordial Cold War*, 153–78.

[638] Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 119.

[639] Ibid., 132.

[640] Ibid.,117.

[641] The interruptive ability of photography in state visits has been highlighted by Simone Direx. Her article details a specific incident where Ibrahim Aboud, the Sudanese President who visited the Federal Republic in April 1962, refused to be photographed around certain 'controversial' sides, in reference to his non-aligned position in the Cold War. Direx sees this intention not to be photographed as an example of 'an

was an opportunity for the Soviets to use the visit experience to sensitise state leaders such as Nehru to their ideology and inspire them to join ranks, as much as to warn the US about its developing proximities with Asian ex-colonial nations like India.

This desire to show and see often was in contradiction with an apprehension of being revealed, perhaps on both sides. Almost a decade after the Kirloskar discussion on potentially hostile power, file records update the official policy on 'Photography of vital government installation and protection thereof in the context of the present emergency'. The successive years saw the strengthening of Indo-Soviet diplomatic ties through regular visits by Heads of State from both sides.[642] From 1959-1962, India was also continually dealing with tensions with China along the Tibet border.[643] Reflecting the mistrust exaggerated through the border tensions with China from 1959-62, the policy discussion on photography of vital government installations defines what is "restricted information" and includes photographs as a part of this restricted information. The files reveal increased anxiety about being revealed through photographic publications. This is especially true in the case of what was defined as "undertakings for the supply of electricity and the supply of water" under the orders of the Home Ministry. However, this anxiety did not just emerge because of the 1962 War. The files from Kirloskar Plant (discussed above) suggest, that a similar nervousness around visibility had currency even in the mid-1950s when the Soviet visit was projected as a huge success in the public eye. The war and corresponding events in the early 1960s only exacerbated the underlying mistrust and anxiety inherent within the postcolonial psyche ever since the 1947 Partition.

In a paradoxical inversion of the Foucauldian view, the records also reveal anxiety of being left out, of not being seen, exhibiting a desperate appeal to be visible to an international audience. As the bureaucratic red tape around restrictions of photography of irrigation and power projects tightened from the 1950s onto the early 1960s, the official discussion also suggests that the officers were wary of "losing good publicity" in front of an international audience who was presumed to be an eager witness to the "country's march towards development and progress". This contradictory impulse of feeling

event that has not been captured on film has not officially taken place'. See, Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 127.

[642] Khrushchev and Bulganin reciprocated Nehru's Visit by visiting India in November 1955, followed by Khrushchev's visit in 1959, and again in February 1960, followed by President Rajendra Prasad's visit to Moscow in November 1960, and Nehru's visit in September 1961. Two months later, USSR Chairman Leonid Brezhnev was in India.

[643] Garver, 'India, China, the United States, Tibet, and the Origins of the 1962 War'; Gupta and Lüthi, *The Sino-Indian War of 1962*; Van der Mey, 'The India—China Conflict'.

nakedly vulnerable when seen by a potentially hostile gaze, while wanting to reveal a decisive projection of oneself to an anticipated audience, is curiously played out through the postcolonial state's relationship with photography two decades after independence. This contradiction can best be summed up in the following quote from the file records:

> *While it is necessary to ensure that information of security value is divulged as a result of such photography/filming, it is at the same time imperative that the development projects in the country are not deprived of good publicity in the national and international sphere, of which photography and documentaries are a powerful and influential medium.*

As a compromise, the Ministry of Home Affairs suggested that the state governments should prepare a list of "all vulnerable places" and decide for themselves "what information [and visual material, my addition] should not be published". One way to do this was to appoint a "responsible officer" who along with the project security officer and the state security officer could accompany the visiting team.[644] Such decentralisation of state power would allow the Home Ministry to cut down on official restrictions and yet ensure surveillance over what can be seen and what can be captured on a camera. However, this order from the Central Government made the distinction between vulnerable and non-vulnerable areas more ambiguous for the officials on the ground. Understanding the state's version of photographic vulnerability was difficult for the ground-level staff, who often relied on verbatim orders. These doubtful scenarios led Joint Secretary K.G.R. Iyer to further elaborate his view in another letter dated April 30, 1965. He suggested that the "photographs giving a panoramic view (unbroken view of the surrounding region) of projects and showing the profile of projects" should be restricted. In other words, "neither the skyline showing the surrounding topography, which may help in the location of vulnerable portions of a project nor a complete view of the project should be allowed to be filmed or photographed." What was allowed was only the "ground level" photographs showing a "non-vulnerable" portion of an installation "with or without a view of the sky in the background". Visual fragmentation and conscious framing were thus offered as possible strategies of diplomatic negotiation.

We have previously discussed that the decision to include or exclude something from the frame is a diplomatic decision. Indira's photograph cut out from A 1094 (Image 60) or K G R Iyer's suggestion to cut out the panoramic views and frame only ground-level views, thus censoring the view of the surrounding 'vulnerable' areas, are all attempts at performing diplomacy. Photographic framing is in other words, an act of diplomatic negotiation resolving the contradiction between the desire to show and the vulnerability of being seen.

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[644] Correspondence from File F 11/5/65 – B(T), NAI, New Delhi.

Bringing the spectator into this discussion, Constantinou argues that the diplomatic eye of the spectator manages to find diplomacy in a non-diplomatic situation through its trapped gaze. This desire of the eye to apprehend diplomacy is perpetuated by the lack of diplomacy. This lack encourages the viewer to look out for it by inventing frames in the form of captioning or editing out unnecessary details or restricting panoramic views. Could we extend this argument in our context, to presume that absent photographs and details in the album presuppose a potential diplomatic vulnerability? While the photographs may or may not have been taken, the vulnerability experienced and the 'restrictions' desired (cutting out the panorama) to soothe this vulnerability, all contribute to the diplomatic encounter. The photograph that was not allowed, and the parts that were cut off from the existing photographic frame are vectors that move the diplomatic negotiation. The photograph, through its cut-out presence or complete absence in A 1094, is the authentic performative in the diplomatic negotiation underlying the Indo-Soviet friendship story narrated in the album.[645] This element of performing presence through absence can also be connected back to the discussion on Freud's screen memories in chapter three and on Album 86 in chapter two.

In the context of this discussion,[646] it is reasonable to situate the camera as a "simultaneous threat and promise".[647] The politics of desiring to be seen versus not revealing oneself fully, marked the state's relationship to photography in a transnational context. The photographic album in discussion is an object that is at the very centre of this optical tension. A 1094 projects the Soviet state as it wanted to see itself, maintaining strict editorial controls over framing, composition, imagery, and sequence. Indo-Soviet projects of friendship were diplomatic attempts to negotiate a contradiction between two varied optical ambitions - showing and hiding.

An example of attempts to strike a balance between display and concealment in the context of Indo-Soviet friendship emerges from the files on the Soviet proposal on *Filming the objects of Indo-Soviet economic cooperation such as metallurgical work in Bhilai*. The town of Bhilai had a special

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[645] Drawing on Constantinou's discussion on Holbein's Ambassadors as a diplomatic portrait.
Constantinou, 'Diplomatic Representations... or Who Framed the Ambassadors?', 17.

[646] Although this discussion is from 1965, it helps to understand the optical anxiety built up throughout the previous decade. The War in 1962 made these tensions explicit to an extent that the joint secretary laid out the composition limits of photographs.

[647] Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive'.

significance in Indo-Soviet relations. It is famous for the Bhilai Steel plant, India's first metallurgical plant set up with Soviet assistance. The plant was operational by February 1959 and when Khrushchev visited India in February 1960, he visited the site to inspect the work.[648] The origin of Bhilai Steel Plant can be traced to Nehru's visit in 1955 when inspired by Magnitogorsk, he asked the Soviet Union for assistance in building India's own steel plant.

The files on the Soviet representatives filming Bhilai suggest that filming (and being seen) in this particular context was deemed "non objectionable" as a way of "furthering mutual goodwill" and "maintaining (a) record of the developments as they occur".[649] Mounting a critique of the Foucauldian photo-histories that explore state-directed vision, I want to use this discussion to suggest that ideological valences could not be pre-determined. As the file records have shown, the politics of seeing/unseeing/being seen and hiding from visibility are all dependent on diplomatic contingencies of their context. Visibility was essential as a method of record keeping, as long as it did not wander away into a vulnerable territory where the gaze became a literal threat. As long as the optics were controlled by the state directives, photographic seeing and being seen both were deemed necessary for bilateral ties. Further, this discussion also highlights space for temporary relief, for suspension of visual restrictions for the purpose of diplomacy. The appearance of diplomacy allows the underlying mistrust to be hidden for the sake of "mutual good will".[650]

Orchestrated Visibility: Not a Lie when Everyone Tells the Same Lie?

On June 22, Nehru along with Indira watched the ballet at the Alisher Novoi Opera and Ballet Theatre (renamed as Bolshoi Theatre in 1966) accompanied by Bulganin, Khrushchev and Mikoyan, the Minister of Trade.[651] Image 67 depicts Nehru's welcome in the concert hall in the presence of a huge audience.

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[648] Khrushchev and Crankshaw, *Khrushchev Remembers,* 355.

[649] However, this non-objection was granted only on the condition that the script will be scrutinised before the filming and the details of the "vital plants at Bhilai would not be publicised" by the makers. File 8 (47) Eur/58 in NAI, New Delhi.

[650] Ibid.

[651] Ralhan, J*awaharlal Nehru Abroad,* 153.
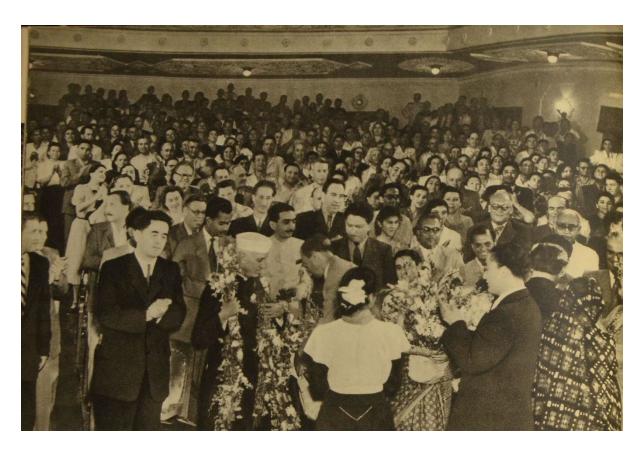
Image 67: State Fine Arts Publishing House, at the Alisher Novoi Theatre, NML-60886, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

Detail of Image 67

The composition is divided horizontally into two parts with Nehru being garlanded and offered flowers in the lower half of the frame. The upper half focuses on the audience, as mentioned in the caption. This photograph is as much about the audience present to welcome Nehru, as it is about Nehru attending the theatre. If one looks closely at the upper half, one sees happy smiling faces of men and women, possibly standing on their toes, peeking over each other's shoulders to grab a glimpse of Nehru. As the focus of the photograph fades into the distance, the crowds get darker, their faces less visible under the shadows.

Finally, as one moves closer to the last line of the crowd in the distance, none of the figures is clearly visible (see closeup). Their faces and bodies are in darkness, and the viewer, at first glance, is asked to assume that this is because there isn't enough light at the back of the hall. However, on close observation one can see that figures in the back row might have been hand drawn. Towards the centre right of the last row, there is a figure in white with his right arm dangling out in an unnaturally squarish posture, akin to children's drawings of human figures. The ceiling does show lights at the back; however, it stops short of illuminating the final row. It seems that the original photograph was airbrushed and even manipulated, as extra figures were added later to show a larger audience for Nehru. It is clear that many people were indeed present in the theatre hall, why then the need to implant an extra row of audience members to an already crowded scene? Was this manipulation done to manipulate the reality of the event, or was it done to alter the aesthetics of the photograph? Perhaps an extra row of people at the back does make the room more crowded than without it.
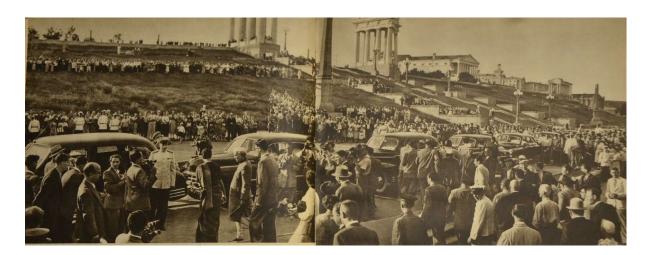
Image 68: State Fine Arts Publishing House, at Stalingrad esplanade, NML-60874, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

Detail of Image 68

The album has several such examples of crowds added into the frame. Image 68 is another landscape photograph of Nehru and Indira along with the Indian diplomatic contingent at the Stalingrad esplanade showing the presence of crowds in its composition. Again, when we look closely at the top left margin, the final row of figures on the plateau are visible only as smaller figurines, strangely positioned at a well-curated distance from one another. The placement of the trees, the pillars, and the human figures vis-à-vis them make it appear like a hand-drawn background of a landscape painting, where each detail is aesthetically crafted.

Image 69: State Fine Arts Publishing House, at Stalingrad Hydro-power Station, NML-60872, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

The Soviet penchant for airbrushing and constructing photographs is well known. David King has investigated the work of photographic retouching and restructuring in Stalinist Russia. Some photographs were so heavily retouched that they looked strange and almost false. While photographic retouching reached its peak around 1935, it was prevalent since the beginning of the twentieth century.

An array of professionals working on airbrushing, montage and scissor work collaborated often in an ad-hoc manner to alter the visual presence of a particular state dissident from all public literature.[652] Altering crowd scenes was a common feature of photographic manipulation in Stalinist Russia. Though the photographic album gifted to Nehru is from the post-Stalinist period, several visual continuities can perhaps be expected. For one, the desire to alter crowd size to create the figure of the "great leader" is evident in the photographs of this album. What emerged with Stalinist propaganda could have found its way in the visual idioms of the period, to a point that any picture trying to depict a popular leader needed to be restructured by adding more crowd figures or manipulating the aesthetic placement of people to achieve a desirable impact.

The manipulations in the photographs also had a diplomatic function. For instance, Image 69 is a wide landscape shot that depicts Nehru's visit to the Stalingrad Hydro Power Station. Again, the photograph is compositionally divided into two almost equal halves horizontally. The lower half is devoted to the guests on the site and the diplomatic entourage around them. The upper half gives the viewer a sense of the space that was visited. Piles of cement suggest heavy construction work, vertical tower lines indicative of electricity and several crane-like figures at the right corner implying the 'work' that is ongoing. If one zooms in on the right corner, the lines of the cranes and metallic towers seem faded, resembling a pencil-drawn industrial landscape. The sharpness of the bottom half of the photograph is absent from the background. Peter Burke notes that "other things being equal, the further into the background a given detail can be found, the more reliable it likely to be".[653] Inverting this logic, the lack of clarity in the background of these images, could hint at its unreliability.

While I haven't accessed Russian sources to know their policy on what can be shown in photographs, the discussion by Iyer, the Indian Joint secretary (in the previous section) reveals the perspective of a state bureaucrat. Perhaps, the background landscape in this case too was hand drawn to replace the original background. Perhaps the background landscape as it were, was too significant for 'national security' and therefore its visual circulation was restricted. Perhaps, the background was manufactured to create an experience of the Stalingrad Hydro-Power Station in general, without showing the details of what really existed.

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[652] King, *The Commissar Vanishes*.

[653] Burke, 'Interrogating the Eyewitness,' *Social and Cultural History*, 439.

The backgrounds and landscapes in diplomatic visits are deliberately chosen sites, aimed to deliver a specific political and diplomatic message.[654] The photographs in the album which appear manipulated or fake, cannot be regarded as a deception, as everyone involved in the production, editing and reception of the album is an aware and willing participant of the diplomatic process and knows the emptiness of these gestures. Referring back to Jennifer Nelson's methodological intervention, I want to argue that the staged/manipulated/fictional nature of the images in the album is not an attempt to hide or fabricate an otherwise authentic perspective. Instead, the staged-ness, the manipulation and the fictionalising are 'the perspective of diplomacy'. In a diplomatic game of *appearances*, the constructed nature of photographs is in service of a reciprocal performance of diplomacy.

Derrida, through Kant and Aristotle, lays bare the paradox of friendship, where under the guise of friendship, enmity or hostility (refigured by Schmitt) thrives[655]. Friendship is not what it appears to be prima facie.

> *Bowing and scraping (compliments) and all the courtly gallantry, together with the warmest verbal assurance of friendship, are not always completely truthful. 'My dear friends,' says Aristotle, 'there is no friend.' But these demonstrations of politeness do not deceive because everyone knows how they should be taken, especially because signs of well-wishing and respect, though originally empty, gradually lead to genuine dispositions of the soul.*[656]

Diplomatic gestures and declarations of friendship made on state visits are at best attempts at maintaining a state of 'no war' (or building an alliance for a war versus another party), while everyone involved is aware of the falsity of such claims. In the case of this album, while several images were possibly constructed, the constructed-ness is not an attempt to hide or fake, but it refers to the diplomatic frame of the visit and also of the Album as a diplomatic object. Photography, since its invention has been hailed for its ability to truthfully record reality. As contentious as this assumption is, and irrespective of the myriad times it has been challenged and disproved, the camera has never been able to completely escape the tenacious assumption that it records the truth. In modern bureaucratic networks, the camera's very ability to record 'reality' has ensured its role as a favoured state tool. A device that can record reality, can also help to modulate, and 'manage', or hide that 'reality' and construct new realities. Located within the transnational optics of that period, this album manufactured a

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[654] On diplomacy and choice of landscape, Rudolph, 'Entangled Objects and Hybrid Practices?', 19. On the political nature of landscapes, see Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*; Warnke, *Political Landscape*; Schama, *Landscape and Memory*; Bermingham, *Landscape and Ideology*.

[655] Schmitt refigures the enemy figure in a political sphere as hostility instead of enmity. This potential threat of hostility is at the core of a friendship. See, Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, 85.

[656] The above quote by Kant is used in Derrida, 274.

diplomatic vision for the Indo-Soviet ties, depicting how they viewed India and how they aspired to be seen by India. This vision was less actual, and more aspirational. Photography was instrumental in crafting this aspirational element to diplomatic relations.

The optics of this visit can be located in what Irwin Goh terms, "a precarious faith in a future relation".[657] As discussed in the previous chapters, the postcolonial moment for India was located in an aspirational futuristic vision. The dream of what India wanted to become was a part of how she positioned herself vis-à-vis other nations. Coming from this context, the visit album can be understood for its intention to go beyond mere representational documentation. It exhibits a futuristic vision (a diplomatic goal of friendship), not just through spoken words and signed agreements but also the gaze manufactured through this visit. Building on Goh's argument, this futuristic gaze "resembled nothing of the present".[658] Photographs and assemblage (in the form of an album) were used to orchestrate an aspiration, while consciously choosing to bypass the present circumstance of the visit. While the visit was a hesitant attempt at exploring the political and economic possibilities for both sides, the photographs were used to project an image of two self-assured friends, one of whom was a gracious and open host, and the other was a beloved and popular guest.

This visit was hailed for being successful in its diplomatic goals. Nehru, as we know, emerged as a hugely popular figure during the visit. K P Menon notes that Nehru received a popular welcome during the visit. As they moved out of the airport after his arrival, Nehru and Bulganin travelled in an open-top car on streets filled with throngs of cheering crowds.[659] More anecdotes about the popularity of Nehru during the visit are narrated in different accounts of the visit as well as in popular newspapers.[660] Even by Nehru's admission, the popular welcome he received was "encouraged" by the Soviet state.

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[657] Goh, 'Rejecting Friendship', 111.

[658] Ibid.

[659] Menon writes that travelling in open cars was a new experience for Bulganin and Nehru was in a way responsible for bringing the Soviet leader close to his own people. See, Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 111. Direx also notes that State visits until the mid-1960s took place in the open until the assassination attempt on Charles De Gaulle in August 1962 and the assassination of John F Kennedy in November 1963 highlighted the danger of the open streets for state representatives. See Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 133.

[660] Nehru was famously showered with bouquets on his visit in what has been termed "floral attacks" in Menon, 163. Nehru's account refers to the popular welcome he received, adding that it though the welcome might have been "encouraged", it was not staged as many critics have suggested. See, Nehru and Longman, *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru (SWJN)*, 280.

Khrushchev in his biography admits that people were often asked to welcome guests, against their will.[661] While he does not specifically refer to Nehru's visit, such instances of "crowd management" staging popularity are not surprising. Even if the crowds were not forced to attend Nehru's welcome, one cannot deny the careful construction of this occasion. Preparatory diplomatic work included several cultural events, including the first-ever Indian film festival organised in the Soviet Union where leading Bollywood stars attended the screenings.[662] An Indian Art Exhibition was displayed, and Nehru's book *Discovery of India* was published in Russian in the run-up to the Visit. Many important statements made by Nehru were published in Soviet newspapers with some carrying a sketch of his life with a full-page photo. By the time he came to Moscow, he had become a "household name".[663]

G K Reddy's writes in *The Times of India*:

> *Mr. Nehru's visit was preceded by weeks of well-organised propaganda portraying him as the best friend of the soviet people outside the communist orbit. He had been described as not only a relentless crusader for world peace but also as active and articulate neutral in the cold war, who had the courage of his convictions and was not afraid of speaking out bluntly to the East and the West. For the last 15 days, Mr Nehru has been the front-page news in all soviet papers. Moscow Radio went all out to play up his visit as a historic event. Day and night its news bulletins and commentaries led with the Nehru story. Even television played its part...So when the government threw open the floodgates after generating public enthusiasm for Mr Nehru, the people responded with wild, over-powering exuberance. Mr Nehru's visit thus became the most popular public festival of the year.*

The addition of crowds to these images is not meant to alter the reality of the photographic event. Instead, the addition of the crowds *is* the reality of the photographs and the diplomatic objective of the photographic event. The extra figures at the back (Images 67-68) do not stand out or distract the viewer (possibly Nehru himself) but align with the aspirational diplomatic projections made through the visit. The album can be regarded as an orchestration of visibility, with an eye toward futuristic gains in the Cold War context. The addition of crowds reveals the aspirational ideal of this diplomatic encounter between India and the Soviet Union.

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[661] Khrushchev and Crankshaw, *Khrushchev Remembers,* 367.

[662] Raj Kapoor and Nargis, and their 1954 film *Awara* which was much appreciated by Russian audiences. For further reference on the popularity of Bollywood stars, see, Lipkov and Mathew, 'India's Bollywood in Russia'.

[663] Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 114.

If diplomacy is an appearance, an orchestration, who is the audience for this orchestrated visit and the ensuing production of A 1094? Discussing the orchestrated and performative nature of state visits to post-war Germany, Direx complicates the many layers of spectating involved in a staged visit. She argues that state visits were planned performances where it became difficult to differentiate between actors and the audience. In a way, the visitor was the audience who was 'seeing' the country, but at the same time, did participate in staging greetings and farewells for the host audience.[664] Continuing that line of argument, the host audience included the political and official members of the host country, but also the 'crowd on the street' who participated in the staging of the visits and further also in the construction of the photographs now seen in this album, through acts such as waving their hands at Nehru, applauding his convoy from the pavement and balconies. Furthermore, the news media present (including reporters and photographers from domestic and foreign press) and the mass media (including newspaper and magazine photographs published on the visit, later) also participated in staging the visit and thereby in A 1094.

In the case of the album, the audience is further compounded by how the album makers *saw* the photographs before it reached India. In a way, the spectators framed in the photographs were eye-witnesses to Nehru's visit along with the photographers and other officials who were present and all of these together played a role in generating the affective experience of the visit. Eyewitnesses could be seen for their role as credible verifiers of the facticity of the event photographed (conversely, photographs reliably validated oral eyewitness accounts, each acting as an alibi for the other). Several photographs in the album show Nehru surrounded by large groups of people, many of whom seem to have gathered to see Nehru. These people can be read as silent eyewitnesses to the narrative of Nehru's popular welcome in the Soviet Union, cementing the photographic narrative projected. At the same time, these eyewitnesses were recorded within the photographic frame, enhancing the experiential validity of these photographs. Nehru as the potential viewer does not need to attest to the presence of the number of people or their faces for the photograph to generate an affective recall. Instead, the image of his convoy surrounded by many people is enough to remind him of the warm welcome he received, irrespective of the discrepancies between the image and the actual event. The local people lend credibility to the visit and form an integral part of the visuality of the 1955 visit.[665]

The presence of an audience is also employed to construct a panoramic viewing experience for the beholder of the album. Unlike the normal photographic protocols, where the subject faces the camera

[664] Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 118–19.

[665] Drawing on Burke, 'Interrogating the Eyewitness'.

and rarely even shows their backside, the album uses the audience on the street to establish a visual entry into a space and to create an exit out of it. On June 8, Nehru visited the Stalin Automobile Plant in Moscow, the Soviet's oldest factory with forty thousand workers producing nearly three hundred vehicles daily.[666] The album dedicates four photographs to this significant episode from the visit (Images 70-71)
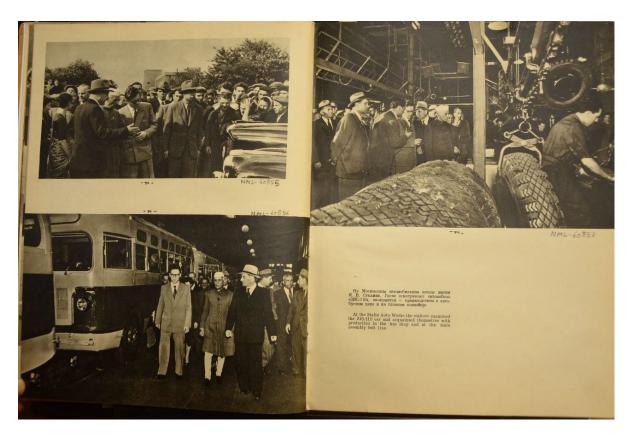
Image 70: State Fine Arts Publishing House, at Stalin Auto Works, NML-60855, NML-60856 and NML-60857, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

Image 70 includes three photographs. In an anti-clockwise direction, the first is an outdoor photograph of Nehru listening to an official, presumably the person in charge of the factory, or an official delegate. Interestingly, the famous Zii cars were manufactured in this factory. Nehru's fascination for this car is mentioned in his 1927 travelogue on Russia.[667] This image could function like an entry shot, suggesting to the viewer that Nehru is about to move into the manufacturing space. The album has already established the anti-clockwise rhythm of viewing. As we move to the next image, Nehru is seen escorted

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[666] Ralhan, *Jawaharlal Nehru Abroad*, 140–41.

[667] Nehru, *Soviet Russia*.

by a bunch of official-looking people in suits, across what seems like an indoor walkway with buses parked on the side. The next photograph in the viewing cycle is a closer shot of tyres and metallic grids representing the inner-workshop space. He is seen keenly observing the working of the tyre carrying machine, operated by a worker. His curiosity about the working conditions in Russia is seen in his reflections on the visit.

Image 71: State Fine Arts Publishing House, on the streets, NML-60858, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

After taking the viewer through the entry, walkway, and a closer view of the insides of the factory, the next page brings us back to the street of Moscow (Image 71). The viewer is introduced to Nehru's car driving away as an exit shot for the factory visit. In the front left corner, almost taking up one-third of the space of the horizontal framing, a man and woman with a baby from the audience block the frame with their backs towards the camera, as they stand and wave at the car. In the far distance, we can observe more crowds lining both sides of the street. But the image is different from other welcome images with Nehru waving at crowds from the car. By choosing to retain the audience's back towards the camera and not crop it out (as they have done on other occasions), the album makers use this photograph with a foregrounded back to frame an exit shot closing the loop on the whole sequence of

images from the Automobile factory. Their perspective of the scene is shared by the viewer of A 1094, as she sees the album thus overlapping the album viewer and the image audience. In a way, this image helps the album viewer prepare for the exit from the factory just like the image audience would have been prepared to bid farewell to Nehru. Burke refers to congealing as one of the limitations of still photographs.[668] Here, congealing might involve the photograph's ability to turn a moving reality into a still image. However as discussed, the form of the album as an assemblage allows its makers to bypass this limitation in favour of a panoramic view, created by sequencing different photographs and by using the presence of the street spectator in the making of the album.

End of the Visit: Possibility of Escaping Diplomatic Orchestration

Early in the morning of June 23rd, Nehru left Moscow. All top Soviet leaders were present at the airport to bid farewell to Nehru,[669] as he flew to Warsaw continuing his visit to Britain before returning to India.[670] The hospitality accorded to a non-communist leader was the "most spectacular affirmation"[671] of the Soviet government's intention to project co-existence with differing ideologies after the death of Stalin. The album manufactured with Soviet authorship ends with a sequence of photographs depicting this farewell scene.

The two photographs on the left page are like the double portraits discussed earlier, in terms of the photographer's and editor's attempt to demarcate Nehru and Bulganin from the crowd, singling them out for their symbolic presence. The photograph (NML 60914 in Image 72) on the right page is interesting for discussion here. It is an aberration to the diplomatic protocols of ranking followed throughout the album. As we discussed earlier, none of the other images gives equal focus to Nehru and Indira, except Image 64, which also continues to portray Nehru as the older statemen, never allowing Indira's presence to overwhelm the more senior diplomat.

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[668] Burke, 'Interrogating the Eyewitness,' 435.

[669] Ralhan, *Jawaharlal Nehru Abroad*, 154.

[670] Nehru flew out of Moscow to Poland, Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, London and Cairo before finally moving back to India on July 13th, 1955, ending his long international travel in the summer of 1955.

[671] Words used by Menon. See, Menon, *The Flying Troika*, 115.

Image 72: State Fine Arts Publishing House, farewell scene, album spread with three photographs, NML-60912, NML-60913 and NML-60914, A 1094, NMML, New Delhi.

The above photograph however stands out for breaking that diplomatic protocol. How does it fit into A 1094 then? Perhaps, this was the only composition available to the photographers present at the airport. Nehru and Indira having moved away from the crowd of people at the foot of the aircraft meant that they were free to break protocol, which in this case is Indira standing shoulder to shoulder, taking up equal frame space with her father Nehru. Had there been another photograph of Nehru waving at the crowd with the aeroplane in the background, it is anybody's guess if that would have been preferred by the album makers. Despite its break away from the diplomatic protocol followed in the album, it finds a place within the album as it is an apt farewell photograph, of two state visitors waving out to their Soviet friends from the doors of the aircraft just before they leave.

This *unwanted* photograph that had to be accommodated because of possible lack of choice, is an instance of the photograph breaking through the constricted protocols of diplomacy, carefully curated through the album. Whether or not the authors desire it, the image interrupts the symbolism of Indo-Soviet friendship constructed through the album. In giving an equal frame space to a female political figure, lower in diplomatic stature than Nehru, this image is indicative of photographic realism that has

the potential to interrupt the theatricality of diplomatic photographs. A seemingly perfect composition and an apt end to the album, this photograph stands out for exposing the planned and constructed nature of the visit, injecting dynamism within an almost stagnant, curated assemblage. Simone Direx talks about the 'transformation' that happens in the scripted nature of diplomatic events, no matter how well planned the event was.[672] Irrespective of the scripted nature of the visit and the representation of it through this diplomatic album, this photograph's dynamism confounds the theatricality underplay elsewhere. As a diplomatic image, this photograph was a part of the international regime of perception in the Cold War, one that possibly escaped the authorial control of its makers. In some ways, it foretold Indira's role in continuing the Indo-Soviet diplomatic relation through the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation of 1971,[673] which countered the Washington-Beijing-Islamabad axis.

The Indonesian Album: An Appeal for Anti-Colonial Solidarity

Adom Getachew's book *Worldmaking After Empire* argues that the anticolonial nationalists were world-makers rather than solely nation-builders, as decolonisation reconstructed not just national politics and boundaries but also international systems for political and economic justice. If empire-making was situated within "international structures of unequal integration and racial hierarchy", it was to be countered with a similar "global anticolonial counterpoint" that could undo the empire's structures of global domination. Getachew argues that the anti-colonial nationalists sought "to overcome the legal and material manifestations of unequal integration and inaugurate a postimperial world" through the institutionalisation of a right to self-determination, formation of regional federations and a demand for a New International Economic Order.[674] He further notes, "… federations secured nondomination by creating new political and economic linkages between postcolonial states, which would gradually erode the relations of dependence and domination that subordinated them in the international sphere."[675]

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[672] Derix, 'Facing an "Emotional Crunch"', 118.

[673] The most significant clauses of the Treaty were Articles 8, 9 and 10. of which Article 8 declared that neither state shall enter into or participate in any military alliance directed against the other party.

[674] Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, 2.

[675] Ibid., 11.

After discussing the formation of the India-Soviet Union diplomatic relationship through the A 1094, I want to briefly bring discuss another album as a counter-example to the album discussed above. Album 123 in the National Archives was presented to Jawaharlal Nehru in 1947 on the occasion of the Indian – Pakistan Independence Day celebrations in Jogjakarta. Locating album 123 in Getachew's arguments on worldmaking, I will explore the anti-colonial demands projected through the album as a contrast to the diplomatic entangledness and orchestrated visibility of A 1094. Together, both these albums (A 1094 and 123) shed light on the fragmented nature of the trans-national gaze on the postcolonial Indian state.
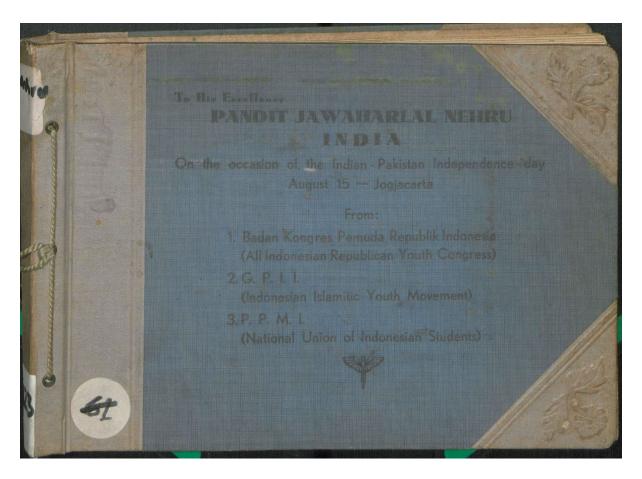
Image 73: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, photo-album cover, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.

Indonesia was exploited by the Dutch through long years of colonial rule from 1800 onwards. The Javanese economy was remodelled to produce cash crops such as sugar and coffee at the expense of rice cultivation. Plus, the exploitative systems of taxation favoured colonial rulers over the labouring peasants. All this together led to frequent famines and epidemics. By the early twentieth century, the false allure of 'benefits' under colonial rule was fading away. Between the wars, seventy-million people

in Indonesia only had access to one-thousand and thirty doctors and only one person in seven million graduated from secondary school.[676] As early as the 1920s, the claims for Indonesian independence were channelled through competing ideologies of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and Sarekat Islam which drew on Muslim sympathies. Heavy censorship and arrests forced the PKI into rapid decline by the end of the 1920s and soon new leadership emerged under Sukarno, Mohammed Hatta and Sjahrir.

In 1942, the Japanese conquered Indonesia to extend their influence in Asia. After the defeat of Japan in the Second World War, Sukarno was forced to declare Independence on August 17, 1945,[677] in a bid to stop the Dutch from reconquering the Indonesian islands. From 1945-49, the Indonesian islands faced a tumultuous crisis, from the Dutch military on one hand, and fratricidal killings within local revolutionary groups on the other.[678] Finally, in 1949, Independence from the Dutch was officially recognised, and Indonesia was acknowledged as a Republic under its first President Sukarno.[679]

Like several other albums in the possession of the National Archives, not much is known about the source of this album. From the front cover, we can assume that the album was co-authored by three youth groups- the Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia (All Indonesian Republican Youth Congress), G.P.I.I. (Indonesian Islamic Youth Movement and P.P.M.I. (National Union of Indonesian Students). It was gifted to Nehru on the occasion of Indian Independence. Instead of looking at the independent history of each of these three groups, my approach will be to analyse this album as an object of Pemuda authorship. In contrast to A 1094 entangled in Cold War diplomacy masked under the veil of friendship, album 123 reflects a collective vision of anti-colonial solidarity between India and Indonesia. It perceives postcolonial India, not as a friend, but as an ally against colonial oppression, using the form of the album to frame the postcolonial Indian nation into optics based on reciprocity and obligation.

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[676] Drawing on Gluckstein, *A People's History of the Second World War.*

[677] Benedict Anderson notes that Sukarno was forced to declare independence by the Pemuda groups. See, Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, 82.

[678] On Indonesian infighting, see Poeze, 'Walking the Tightrope'.

[679] The Roem-Roijen agreement in May 1949 settled the outstanding issues between the Indonesians and the Dutch, with Indonesia finally 'granted' independence at the Round Table Conference in Hague later that year. This happened roughly four years after the Indonesian Republic declaring their Independence in 1945.

The role of several Pemuda or youth/student groups in this revolutionary fight for Indonesian Independence has been at the forefront of most historical writing of these war years. The youth movement was a people's war from below, involving armed militias and mass insurrection, which targeted the Dutch-British alliance, the Japanese troops and local Indonesians who had benefitted from either Dutch colonialism or Japanese militarisation.[680] Pemuda groups from 1945-49 were known to author acts of "social revolutions" on a small scale across the Indonesian islands. Common examples include Jakarta radio and train workers taking control of the Japanese-owned enterprises they were employed for, or the successful removal of all Japanese officials from the Railways.[681] More and more Pemuda groups grew in the countryside as the membership increased. These groups were united less by a common ideology, and more by a common aim of destroying the oppressors.[682] Doreen Lee recounts the consistency of the *Pemuda* concept in Indonesian history, from 1908 until 1998.[683] Known as Generation 45, the Pemuda youth of 1945-49 was culturally distinct from their predecessors, united by a nationalist spirit within the youth. There was no solitary institutional backing for these, as different Pemuda groups were often in competition with each other. However, their role in the declaration of Indonesian independence is tied to public imagination - as the Pemudas who forced Sukarno to declare independence in August 1945, two years before India and Pakistan.[684]

Like other photographic material discussed in the thesis, Album 123 is also more than just photographic. Photographs are stuck on paper with hand-drawn details that add to their contextual reading. A common motif in the hand-drawn sections is the presence of roads and trucks, presumably carrying essential commodities and supplies into the Indonesian Republic. In January 1947, the Dutch colonial powers imposed a blockade which made export regulations on the local population very stringent. Territories under the Republican control (all Indonesian lands except Java and Sumatra which were ruled by the Dutch) were prohibited from trade with the outside world without Dutch permits.[685] In this context, open trade routes became a significant rallying point for anti-colonial solidarity in Indonesia. A major section of the album (Images 74-76) is dedicated to the rice and cloth diplomacy between India and

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[680] *Gluckstein, A People's History of the Second World War*, 184.

[681] Anderson, *Java in a Time of Revolution*, 118.

[682] Gluckstein, A *People's History of the Second World War,* 187.

[683] Lee, 'Images of Youth', 316.

[684] Shiraishi, *An Age in Motion.*

[685] For a detailed reference, see Homan, 'American Business Interests in the Indonesian Republic, 1946-1949'.

Indonesia in those years. A total of fourteen photographs address the bilateral relationship forged based on sharing rice with and receiving cloth from India.

Tuong Vu writes about the control of the rice market in Indonesia by the Japanese military from 1942-45 leading to extreme scarcity and famines in Indonesia.[686] Even after the War when the Japanese left, rice became a symbol of authority used by the postcolonial Indonesian state to wield its power. As seen through this album, sharing rice was a part of its diplomatic ties with India.[687] Nehru's speech in 1946 reflecting on the need for inter-Asia conversations amidst an increasingly polarised world, mentions the Indonesian offer to send rice to India.[688] This reference can be seen as suggestive of the larger gift diplomacy within the framework of inter-Asia relations. One of the other activities initiated by the Pemuda activists was the free distribution of cloth in villages. Owing to the Dutch imposed blockades, the cloth had become so difficult to obtain that "in some places, women were unable to go out and farmers worked in the field stark naked".[689] Authored in this context, the photographic album devotes four photographs (Images 75 and 76) to India's generosity in sharing cloth with the Indonesians, offering gratitude to create further obligation as solidarity.

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[686] Vu, 'Of Rice and Revolution'.

[687] For more reference, see Cribb, 'The External Rice Trade of the Indonesian Republic, 1946-47'.

[688] Nehru credits this rice diplomacy to his personal relationship with the leaders of the Indonesian Republic, especially his close ties with Sjahrir, a popular face of the Indonesian movement against Dutch colonialism. See, Nehru's speech for the Indian Council of World Affairs on 22 August 1946, in Nehru, 'Inter-Asian Relations'.

[689] Gluckstein, *A People's History of the Second World War,* 179.
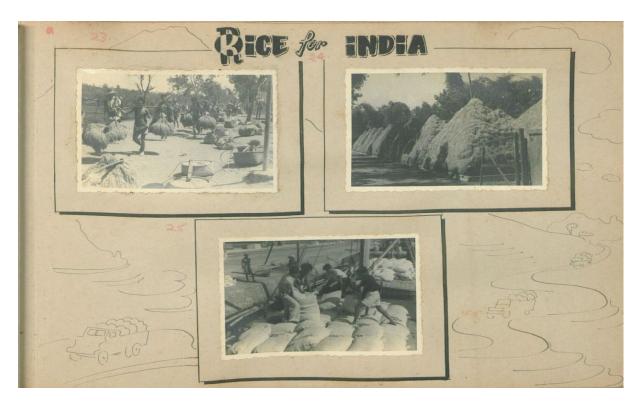
Image 74: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'Rice for India', photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.
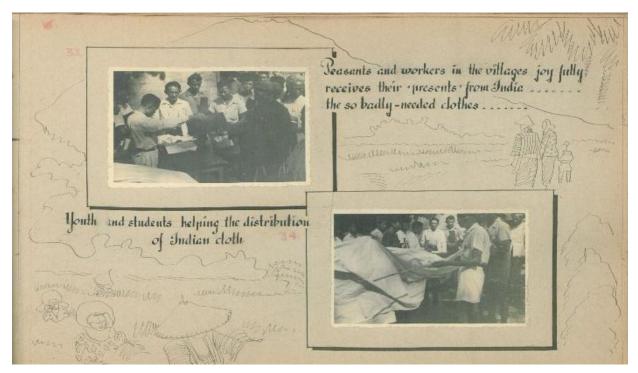
Image 75: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'Rice for India', people receiving clothes, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.
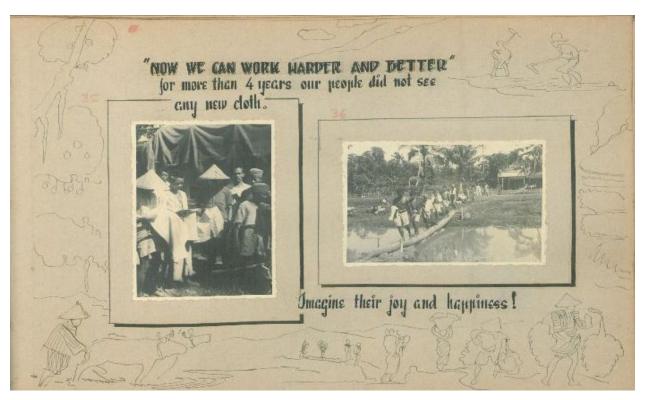
Image 76: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'Rice for India', people holding cloth, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.

Drawing from Mauss's idea of obligation and reciprocity in gift exchange (discussed in chapter two), album 123 showing photographs of gifts exchanged, becomes a part of the ongoing reciprocal exchange between the two countries. The photographs of rice and cloth are, in turn, gifts in reciprocity, acknowledging the obligation of the previous gifts received while simultaneously furthering the gift exchange. Interestingly, the photographs *of* the gifts – rice and cloth, are included *as* a gift in the album. Here, the diplomatic relationship between India and Indonesia is formulated through the social mechanism of gifting that lies outside the modern-capitalist matrices dictating the Cold War politics of the period (A 1094 is an example of a trans-national optics generated out of Cold War capitalist self-interest). Despite the criticisms of Mauss' work, O'Neill defends him arguing that modern gift societies were limited in their perception as they could not fathom gift economies based on solidarity, trust, and time.[690] The photographic gift of album 123, impinged on shared histories of colonial oppression between India and Indonesia. It articulated an optics that was rooted in this shared sense of oppression, and struggle against a common form of oppression, thus obligating the receiver (India) to align in solidarity with the Indonesian anti-colonial struggle.

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[690] O'Neill, 'What Gives (with Derrida)?', 135.

In 1946, Nehru asked Biju Patnaik to assist the Indonesian Republic leaders in their fight against the Dutch, by ferrying medicines and humanitarian assistance. Patnaik's Kalinga airlines owned a dozen Dakota planes which were used several times from 1946-49. The air route allowed the Indonesians to evade the land and sea blockades put in place by the Dutch and British Allied forces. On 21 October 1947, the C-47 Dakota aeroplane, which was on its way from Singapore to Jogjakarta carried Red Cross markings and as the Indonesians argue, the plane was flown only after necessary approvals from the Dutch. The night before the scheduled take-off, Malayan Radio broadcasted the schedule of the flight with its registration number informing listeners that this flight would be on a mercy mission carrying medical supplies from the Malayan Red Cross. It was shot down by Kittyhawk planes a few miles away from its landing destination of Maguwa airfield, killing all but one passenger on board: A. Adisutjipto, A. Saleh, and P. Adisumarno. Pilot Alexander Noel Constantine (Australian), co-pilot Roy Hazlehurst (British), flight engineer Bidha Ram (Indian), Zainal Arifin (the Indonesian consul in Malaya) and Mrs Constantine were also killed. The only survivor was passenger Mr A. Handokotjokro.[691] Initially, the Dutch authorities tried to escape accountability by claiming that they had not been informed of the flight and that the aircraft carried no Red Cross markings.[692] However, one of the crew members' bodies also showed signs of being shot at, refuting Dutch claims of an unintentional attack.[693]

The album devotes considerable photographic space to this incident. A total of nineteen photographs are devoted to Dutch "police measures", questioning the Dutch role in perpetrating atrocities on innocent Indonesians in the name of "police measures". After the Japanese defeat in the Second World War, the Dutch reconquest of the Indonesian islands was supported by the British and US forces. From the end of 1945 until November 1946, the British covered the Dutch army and ensured the presence of 100,000 Dutch military personnel in Indonesia. Among continuing conflict between the Dutch military and the Indonesian Republican Army, the Lingaddjati Agreement was signed hoping to reach a ceasefire. However, within four months, the Dutch military attacked Java and Sumatra, breaking the codes of the signed agreement, and captured some of the richest agricultural and mineral lands under the Indonesian Republic. The Netherlands Government used the term *police-action* for its military actions. The album, perhaps made after August 1947 refers to this term when it questions the Dutch shooting down the aeroplane. Raymond Kennedy (1948) in a report in the Far Eastern Survey highlights

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[691] From the Battle of Britain London Monument webpage which lists air stories of slain pilot F/O A Constantine, accessed on February 19, 2022 on http://www.bbm.org.uk/airmen/Constantine.htm

[692] From Aviation Safety Network web database. Accessed February 19, 2022 on https://web.archive.org/web/20121013114131/http://aviation-safety.net/database/record.php?id=19471021-0

[694] Kennedy, 'Truce in Indonesia', 66.

that the main purpose of the Dutch police-action of 1947 was to seize possession of the commercially most profitable regions of Indonesia.[694] The Linggadjati Agreement did not allow the Dutch to control these commercially important regions and therefore the Dutch took them by military force termed as a police-action.[695]

Images 77-78 are close-up graphic photographs of the aeroplane after it crashed in the field. These are not professionally shot, but amateurish attempts to capture the crash. The framing is raw and edgy, and the content is almost unrecognisable without the context and the text. It seems as if the photographer went very close to the broken aeroplane to get the picture in a bid to present the most *authentic* evidence of the Dutch assault. But in the bargain, this proximity compromised clarity of vision and a coherent visual frame. Azoulay reminds us that *atrocity* photographs often don't capture the atrocity visually and yet must be understood as atrocity photographs by the context in which it was made.[696] The sharp edges of the aeroplane captured at close range in the image may not reveal the exact visual expanse of the tragedy, but it reveals the shock and horror experienced by the unexpected attack. While the rest of the plane was damaged beyond recognition, the tail survived in one piece and is now preserved as a memory of the crash and of those who died that day. A photograph on the bottom right corner in Image 78 shows the tail of the crashed aeroplane. Images of extreme destruction and ruins could be read as evidence of the shock experienced after the loss, rather than of what is captured in its visual frame. Paul Lowe suggests that images, where visible violence is absent, can direct the viewer into an "imaginative engagement with the nature of atrocity and the nature of those who perpetrate it".[697] Those images that show the aftermath of the crash here can be read as markers of the shock, encouraging the viewer to affectively engage with the loss.

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[694] Kennedy, 'Truce in Indonesia', 66.

[695] Historical records suggest Dutch massacres in Indonesia from 1945-49. In Sulawesi in 1946, Dutch Captain Raymond Westerling ordered the murder of three to four thousand Indonesians suspected to be enemy fighters. This massacre was recently brought up for re-examination in the Dutch court in 2011 when families of survivors went to court asking for compensation. The court agreed to grant compensation in select cases. As Stef Scagliola points out, while many have hailed this step as positive, it also allows the Dutch state the choice to own up to certain war crimes and escape certain others. See, Scagliola, 'Cleo's "Unfinished Business"'.

[696] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 251.

[697] Lowe, *Picturing the Perpetrator*, 189.
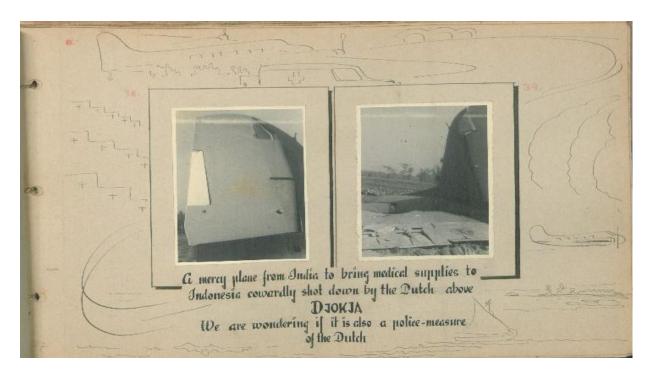
Image 77: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'untitled', air-crash, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.

Image 78: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'untitled', air-crash, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.

Image 79: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'untitled', air-crash, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.
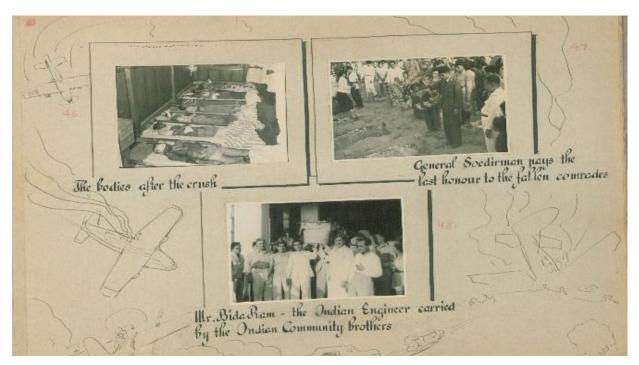
Image 80: Badan Kongres Pemuda Republik Indonesia, GPII, PPMI, 'untitled', air-crash, photographs in album, Album 123, NAI, New Delhi.

These photographs are also intended to act as witnesses of Dutch war crimes. The assemblage and text surrounding the photographs attempt to mutualize the loss, implicating Nehru (the implied recipient of this album) to share the feelings of loss and shock. The pencil drawings surrounding the photographs use motifs like the aeroplane and medical supply vehicle to build up that context, finally depicting the crash in the last picture. The pencil drawings fill the gaps in the story that photographs are unable to narrate by themselves. Photographs are but one component in the process of fixing accountability of colonial atrocities. For it to be acknowledged as an atrocity, the photograph alone does not suffice.[698] While Azoulay points to other kinds of activist work as essential in the context of an atrocity, my interest here is in observing how the limitations of the photographic form have been compensated by the structure of the album and by pencil drawings to set up the context. Together, they are intended to build the Dutch atrocity narrative.

The conjoined nature of photography and allied practices like album making and pencil drawings in building the Dutch atrocity narrative becomes critical when seen in the context of Dutch imagery around their presence in Indonesia. Protschky analyses amateur photography albums sent back home by Dutch soldiers on war duty in Indonesia. Most of these albums visualised common themes like participation in food-distribution programs at the Red Cross, and Dutch military doctors treating local civilians from injuries. These photographic albums picturised Dutch soldiers as humanitarians and injuries on locals as a mark of civilian unhappiness under the Republican leaders. The Dutch military action in such a space was projected as a "restoration of peace and order" in a country torn by infighting and local corruption.[699] This restoration was touted as a *sacred mission*, to civilise the natives for self-governance, possible only through Dutch humanitarian assistance.[700] As Protschky argues the *suffering* shown in the photographs of Dutch soldiers eliminated their own role in the Indonesian islands. The photographs portrayed themselves as sympathetic spectators, playing with children and enjoying family time with local Indonesian women and children,[701] or as humanitarian actors intervening to *save* the natives.[702] The war was fought by circulating "images of civilians" back home in the Netherlands, where Dutch soldiers escaped accountability for their role as perpetrators of violence. As Protshcky puts it, the Dutch

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[698] Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 252.

[699] Protschky, 'Burdens of Proof', 265.

[700] This analysis resonates with David Campbell's work on how famine imagery invested colonial relations of power, projections of which could range from violent suppression to a humanitarian concern with the well-being of the colonial subjects. See, Campbell, "The Iconography of Famine," in *Picturing Atrocity*, 84.

[701] Protschky, 'Burdens of Proof', 266.

[702] Protschky, 'Soldiers as Humanitarians'.

soldiers, as seen from the projections of their albums, were silent witnesses to the violence inflicted by someone else.[703]

In this optical context, the photographs of the Dutch atrocities shared in album 123 overturn this colonial conceptualisation, holding the Dutch military accountable for its action through photographic evidence that is further built up through the album form (text, assemblage, and pencil drawings). Even though the Kittyhawk or the Dutch soldiers are absent from the photographic frame, the photographs implicate them as perpetrators of violence against the local inhabitants for whom the medical supplies were being sent. The photographs of the aeroplane after the crash symbolise the act of anti-colonial witnessing. The purpose of the photograph here marks the site of atrocity with its presence, confirming that it shared the same temporal space with the actions of the Dutch military and that by laying claim to a shared temporal space, the photographs, irrespective of what they show, perform the very political act of witnessing a colonial atrocity. Paul Virilio famously drew a comparison between photography and the battlefield: "For men at war, the function of the weapon is the function of the eye".[704] Conversely, album 123 uses the function of the eye (camera) to wage an optical war, exposing the colonial humanitarian imagery and the 'saviour' stereotypes it perpetuated.

Roland Barthes has famously written that photography's evidential nature is indebted to its 'having been there' quality. It certifies the presence of a witness, which validates its truth-making potential.[705] However, John Tagg has pointed out that the relationship between the photographic referent and the sign is complicated and meaning can't be guaranteed but has to be drawn out.[706] Building on his point, Brothers has pointed out that atrocity photographs are not evidence of truth in themselves, but a testimony to the collective imagination that gave meaning to the photographs.[707] The photographs shown in album 123 are evidence of the collective anti-Dutch sentiment of the Indonesian youth workers. This sentiment is grounded in years of anticolonial struggle and India-Indonesia solidarity

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[703] Protschky, 'Burdens of Proof', 266. For a general reading of Dutch colonial vision in Indonesia, see Ray, *Celluloid Colony.*

[704] Virilio, *War and Cinema*, 26.

[705] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 76, 87.

[706] Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*.

[707] Brothers, *War and Photography*, 184.

through that struggle.[708] The photograph refrains from drawing any archetype of individual evil, choosing to bypass depictions of faces of Dutch militia. Instead, the close-up of the broken aeroplane acts as a symbolic referent to the presence of the Dutch military in general. The photograph here is a witness not just of the broken aeroplane, but of the anti-Dutch sentiment and colonial struggle which produced this image. The truth of the photograph here is less to do with what is represented, "it bears witness instead to the ideological currents which produced it and the collective imagination it inflected and to which it contributed".[709] The act of witnessing thus is not inherent in the photographic image, but in the culture of which it is a part. As a part of an album given to India, the photographs of the plane crash above (Images 77-79) call upon the viewer as a witness to the colonial atrocity, expecting a reciprocal sharing of the anti-colonial sentiment.

Image 80 shows the dead bodies of the slain crew members and passengers on board the VT-CLA aeroplane. "Portraits individualise the social", writes David Campbell in his work on famine iconography.[710] Inverting his logic, the photograph of the bodies of all those who died, through its grouping, collectivises the grief and victimhood, marking the deaths as a social injustice done to the Indonesians by their colonial oppressors. None of the victims is identifiable individually in the photographs. The focus is on the collective loss rather than on claiming an individual face for the attack. The deaths are also not isolated from their context, waiting for an outside 'saviour'. Placing the deaths in a context – how were they killed, where were they killed, how their funerals were organised and who was present in the mourning, the photographs are invested with political urgency. These deaths depicted through images of collective mourning, overturn the colonial saviour complex by incriminating these redeemers in the role of the perpetrator. The accompanying text makes a mocking reference to the Dutch *sacred mission*. The scared mission, as we know, was a term used by the colonial government as a justification for its colonial project.[711]

Album 123 extends the loss beyond the Indonesian origins and recasts it as a pain shared with ex-colonial India. The Indian engineer who lost his life in the crash, Bidha Ram finds special mention in

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[708] As noted earlier, Nehru and Sjahrir had friendly relations that went back to the 1930s. Sutan Sjahrir, like Nehru, was trained in law in Leiden (home to his colonial oppressors) and also shared Nehru's socialist leanings.

[709] Brothers, *War and Photography*, 185.

[710] Campbell, 'The Iconography of Famine', 83.

[711] For more on the missionary efforts of the Dutch administration in Indonesia, see Van der Kroef, 'Problems of Dutch Mission Policy in Indonesia'.

the album. Instead of showing the close-up of his dead body, the album makers chose to fill up the frame of the photograph through pictures of his funeral procession by the Indian Volunteer Corps (see the photograph in the bottom half of Image 80), depicting his death as a collective loss for India. The viewing conditions generated by the photograph collapse the diplomatic distance through a portrayal of shared losses and shared struggles. By expanding the atrocity narrative from Indonesia's unique victimhood to include India's losses (human and logistical),[712] these photographs reflect an attempt to obligate the viewer (PM Nehru) into anti-colonial solidarity across India and Indonesia. This solidarity was built on the grounds of a shared loss and the shared pain of colonial intimidation. In doing so, this album goes well beyond its indexical role, situating itself within a larger system of obligation and exchange built on the conception of anti-colonial solidarity. Drawing on Getachew's worldmaking argument discussed earlier, the decolonising momentum of the period was not limited to nation-state formation as is often argued. This album reveals an attempt to forge decolonial solidarities between Indonesia and India.[713] Photography was employed not to just document, but to implicate the viewer (presumably Nehru) to act as a witness to Dutch atrocities and also obligate him to intervene, thus offering a glimpse into the remaking of the world after the fall of the empire. The intimacy afforded by the photographic album played a significant role in engendering anti-colonial modes of viewing beyond national boundaries, offering possibilities of shared witnessing and forming solidarities against domination.

In conclusion to the chapter, while the Soviet album discussed earlier expanded on the host nation's self-interest as a key diplomatic variable, album 123 highlights the shared experiences of colonialism as a means for forging anti-colonial solidarity among Asian nations. It indicts India as a co-sufferer, an ally in the fight against colonial oppression. Before the 'third world' came together through a non-aligned ideology at Bandung in 1955, the Asian Relations Conference in 1947 was significant in forging political alliances among the Asian nations. Vineet Thakur refers to this as the "opening act of decolonial solidarity".[714] Album 123, possibly given to Nehru at this conference, reveals the shades of this decolonial solidarity. While a lot of scholarship has categorised the late 1940s and 1950s as a period of Cold War, the existence of album 123 as a gift object within the context of developing anti-colonial

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[712] Biju Patnaik, the Indian administrator in charge of the flight operations in Indonesia, was furious over this incident and persuaded Nehru to take up this issue with the Dutch government. Though the allegations were initially refuted, the Dutch Government later financially compensated India for its losses, acknowledging the impact of its actions on India.

[713] The album is inclusive of Pakistan too, as the opening page congratulates India and Pakistan on their Independence from colonial rule and shows photographs of Indonesians celebrating India and Pakistan's newfound freedom from colonial domination.

[714] Thakur, 'An Asian Drama'.

solidarity among Asian nations, can point to different trajectories of international relations highlighting obligation, reciprocity, and solidarity as key variables in the emerging alliances between the ex-colonial nations. It also hints at the possibility of a transnational gaze, beyond the contours of Cold War politics.

A 1094 curated a trans-national optic, the subject of which was the postcolonial Indian state embodied through the figure of Nehru and his curiosity about *seeing* the Soviet Union. Through Nehru's sightseeing, the Soviet Union simultaneously projected itself. A different kind of transnational optic underlines album 123 where obligation, reciprocity and solidarity frame the relations between the two states. While A 1094 depicts the Soviet Union's image of India as a friend entangled in the diplomatic negotiations of the Cold War, album 123 positions India as a possible anti-colonial ally, attempting to leverage a shared sense of oppression. Seen from the eyes of its transnational spectators, the developmental modernist Indian nation-state reveals a part of itself through each album.

Conclusion

Girish Karnad's Kannada language play *Tughlaq* was written in 1964, the point at which our story ends. In thirteen scenes, the play is the story of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, the fourteenth-century Sultan of Delhi. Widely acclaimed as a political allegory, Karnad's play chronicles the twenty years of Tughlaq's rule in a striking similarity to the (nearly) two decades of the Nehruvian period.[715] According to Kannada writer UR Ananthamurthy, *Tughlaq* reflected the "political mood of disillusionment which followed the Nehruvian era of idealism in the country".[716]

In the play, the idealistic but authoritarian king wanted to build a secular state, moving his capital from Delhi to the Hindu-majoritarian city of Daulatabad. The story is about the disintegration of his kingdom during his reign. The highlight of the play, as argued by many,[717] is the series of contradictions built within the narrative of the play. Besides the obvious religious, intellectual, and existential contradictions that are overtly referenced through the dialogues, the play also built contradictions through the narrative form. As Karnad himself noted, "… the fact that here was the most idealistic, the most intelligent king ever to come on the throne of Delhi…and one of the greatest failures also…This seems to be both due to his idealism as well as his shortcomings within him…And I felt in the early sixties India had also come very far in the same direction…"[718]

Tughlaq is an apt example to conclude our discussion. Mohamad Tughlaq was known to be a scholar of philosophy and logic and an idealist for his times. And yet, he was also known for his unscrupulous ambitions and fantastical notions that ultimately led to his downfall.[719] Tughlaq and its allegorical reference to the sixties in postcolonial India share a common utopian aspiration that turned into a gigantic disillusionment. In this dissertation, I have attempted to chart the journey of these conflicting impulses in ocular terms, expanding on the postcolonial state's dreams of a forward march seen in its desire to create sublime spectacles such as the Bhakra Dam and in its illusionary visions of homogenous

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[715] While there are views that see Tughlaq as a Nehruvian allegory, there are voices of disagreement too. See, Krishna, 'Girish Karnad's Play Tughlaq'. Karnad himself it seems, did not want to stretch the comparisons too far.

[716] Ananthamurthy, '"No Play in Kannada Comparable to Tughlaq"'.

[717] Ibid.; Mantri, 'Girish Karnad's Tughlaq'; Datta, 'Looking Back at "Tughlaq" by Girish Karnad'.

[718] Karnad quoted in Ananthamurthy, '"No Play in Kannada Comparable to Tughlaq"'.

[719] Nehru on Mohammad Tughlaq, in Nehru, *An Autobiography: Glimpses of World History,* 214.

malleable villages. Simultaneously, I have attempted to deconstruct the internal contestations in each of these visions, hinting that a mis*perception* possibly led to eventual failures.

Much like Tughlaq, the Sultan and *Tughlaq*, the play, this story has been tragically plagued by a sense of urgency. Tughlaq's pursuit of idealism, distant from the ground realities of his subjects was encouraged by his desire to create a historical legacy for himself. The play also reveals how this sense of wanting to hurriedly get 'somewhere' is an ultimate flaw in his personality, leading to eventual ruin. In the dissertation, my attempt has been to explore the viewing conditions generated by the anxious urgency that marked postcolonial state-making. The pursuit of heroic idealism, as Karnad shows in his play, was the ultimate tragedy. The contradictions between the ruler's ideal visions and the common man's pre-occupation with survival[720] exemplify the inability of state vision to live up to the contested realities on the ground. This dissertation has attempted to interject the photographic idealism projected by the postcolonial state through its tragic mis*perceptions*, repressions, and silencing.

At one point in the play, the lead character's journey of disintegration, and his internal contradictions, are replicated through his insomnia and hyper-conscious state. A semi-awake state could be seen in association with Freud's unconscious where the repressed visions (and memories) come to the foreground. These could be a fertile ground to observe the internal contradictions of vision, usually made inaccessible by the more awake states. Three chapters in this dissertation have demonstrated a persistent effort to access this semi-conscious space of state vision – one where the repressed lies buried, and the silenced lies invisible. In the Introduction, we explored the traces of the partition found within the Photos Division, that could potentially allude to the urgent desire for a forward march leaving behind an unsettling present. In the second chapter, we explored, the systemic blind-spot in how the Indian postcolonial nation-state saw. An inability to see caste as a structural reality of Indian villages, reducing it into a localised problem of discrimination and atrocity, was an optical failure. In the third chapter, we explored what lies repressed beneath the spectacular optics of the Bhakra Dam. Those who were at risk working on the Dam site and those who were displaced by the idealist vision, reveal themselves through the 'screen'.

In his search for idealism, *Tughlaq* commits blunders. As we have discussed, idealism has a strong aesthetic and visual component to it, and so did the blunders. "If this fort ever falls, it will crumble from

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[720] Mantri, 'Girish Karnad's Tughlaq'.

the inside"[721] says a character in the play, referring to the inherent (personality) flaws in *Tughlaq* that ultimately led to his downfall. Internal dissonances were enough to shatter the utopian dream. While this aspect has been highlighted throughout the dissertation, it is most significant in chapter three when we discussed the portrayal of the accident and the perceptions of those displaced by the promises of development.

Coming back to the story of *Tughlaq*, at the end of scene III, as Tughlaq's descent is about to begin, a character dressed exactly like him tells him, "I wish I could be more sure of you". [722] It would be apt to end this story professing this unfulfilled wish. In the decade(s) after 1947, many wanted to believe the utopian dream, yet the disillusionment kept growing as more and more people were pushed to the margins, or completely outside, beyond the contours of the state's frames of seeing. The failure of state curated optics was a failure to see the citizens in their contradictory existence, a failure to include 'people'[723] who desired and had a right to participate in the envisioning of postcolonial India.

<p style="text-align:center">*****</p>

In conclusion, it is pertinent to answer the question - why write a history of photography like this?

Photography, as we know, arrived in India soon after its invention in the West and since then has been proliferating in several fields – from studio businesses to colonial projects of state-making, from advertising and print culture to scientific manuals and so on. Steve Edwards in his book *Photography: A Very Short Introduction* notes that "The problem is simply that photography runs in all directions, permeating diverse aspects of society. Indeed, it is difficult to find an area of modern life untouched by it."[724] While this ubiquitous presence of photography continued to define the use of the photographic medium throughout the twentieth century, the emergence of the postcolonial state in India intersected photography with nation-building, an area of research that is understudied at the moment. This dissertation has attempted to address that.

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[721] Paul, 'Girish Karnad Interviewed,' 51.

[722] Ibid., 24.

[723] I am using the word 'people' to connote the multiplicities of subaltern masses, as is used by Ranajit Guha and G Aloysius in their critique of nationalist historiography (discussed in the Introduction).

[724] S Edwards, *Photography: A Very Short Introduction*, xi.

But how to really write a history of photography in the initial years of nation-building, given that the state as the producer, collector and 'filing cabinet' of the new nation, operated with a gigantic amount of understudied, often censored photographs percolating varied areas of postcolonial life?

In the early postcolonial years, photography was not acknowledged formally in art schools. It struggled to receive official patronage and funding. While several amateur photography clubs and a few lone supporters did rally for photography's recognition as fine art, I argue that this very delay in the formal adoption of photography as an artistic practice has paved the way for us to write about the history of photography that accounts for its multifarious life in the social sphere. The ubiquitous and rhizomatic lens afforded by the photographic medium offers a productive approach to understanding the diversity of postcolonial viewing conditions generated through a series of contestations, contradictions, and negotiations peculiar to their context, while being constitutive of their precolonial and colonial trajectories, within broader historical materialist conditions.

The dissertation seeks to look back at the persisting legacies of the post-1947 postcolonial state and its often murky and futile attempts to consolidate a vision of itself and the citizens, for itself and the citizens. I have attempted to reorient the state's photographic vision as emerging from the transformations within the Photos Division, other state institutions like the PWD and the Nangal Dam archive, also occasionally referring to official magazines like the *Yojana* and *Kurukshetra*. Simultaneously, state vision also emerges in a relational space with outside agents. To address this relational emergence of state vision, I have discussed photographs published in magazines like the *Marg*, local exhibitions such the *Images of India*, local photography clubs, as well as transnational sites such as the workers' movements in Indonesia and the State Fine Art Department in Moscow. All these together contribute to, complicate, and expand the contours of what we can understand as postcolonial state vision.

There is value in this as writing a history of photography in this manner complicates photography's role as evidence/illustration. It reveals that the meanings afforded through the photographic medium are constituted through a broader semiotic network that is not free from ideological contradictions and functional usage. There is also value in questioning photographs as historical knowledge, not denying its evidentiary potential, but exploring ways in which this very ability of photographs to depict 'empirical fact' was tied to the use of photographs to hide, suppress, and omit lived realities and construct fictional narratives. Through the four chapters, this dissertation has tried to highlight the

messy and ambiguous nature of the photographic medium, asserting that photographs are *not* just about the photographic image. Seeing photographs beyond their representational value, allows us to probe into the layers of visual knowledge and power embedded in the use of the medium.

In some ways, this dissertation has attempted to expand the historiography of postcolonial photography in India to write a history of visualisation through photography – how does the state see itself and its citizens? How do the citizens, cultural groups and trans-national groups/institutions see the postcolonial state? These questions have been integral to my analysis. As Tankha notes, "the image becomes a window to visualisation itself … a history of seeing and being seen."[725] The value of writing histories of photography which interrogate its role in constructing a vision is a useful exercise in unravelling the postcolonial state and illuminating all that it excludes, through metaphors of what the state sees and unsees.

Anthropologist Anna Tsing notes the lingering presence of 'progress' as a philosophical category in the very definition of what it means to be human. She notes that academic scholarship also often assumes that the "trope of progress is sufficient to know the world, both in success and failure. The story of decline offers no leftovers, no excess, nothing that escapes progress. Progress still controls us even in tales of ruination."[726] How can we then escape this tyranny of determinacy that modernist vocabularies of progress inflict on those wanting to write histories of photography? To complicate matters, the photographic medium has a historical connection with empiricism, truth claims, evidence, and archival knowledge, which only exaggerates its determinist vocabulary. This is a question I have pondered over while spending time in the archives collecting photographs for this dissertation. How am I supposed to draw up a critique of the scientific technocratic visions of developmental modernity and progress, using photographs and archival collections that were meant to further that agenda for the postcolonial state? Is there a way to read photographs outside of their deterministic connotations? To complicate its image aesthetics? To intercept the authority of the filing cabinet? How to write a history of postcolonial photographic representations of progress, development and modernity without looking for evidence of critique within the empirical frame of the photographs, without trying to use the photographs to narrate a 'counter-truth'? How to read the photographs then, and how to conjure an alternative?

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[725] Tankha, 'Frame(s) of Reference', 129.

[726] Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*, 21.

I have been inspired by Tsing, who encourages a curiosity about "multiple temporalities, revitalising description and imagination", not relying on "simple empiricism", but instead looking for "what has been ignored because it never fits the timeline of progress."[727] Her project is an invitation to "abandon progress rhythms"[728] and to *notice* what is left,[729] notice the unintentional, notice "what comes together-not just by pre-fabrication, but also by juxtaposition"[730]. Her definition of the *assemblage* as open-ended gatherings has been useful to draw up "potential histories in the making",[731] producing a sort of *counter-archive* of state vision through this dissertation. The question "What's left?" has been a useful prompt to write histories of photography outside official planning and visions, those that exist on the edge, and lie in the realm of the unpredictable and unstructured. If the state tried to regiment national vision through concentrated efforts (whether it succeeded or not), this dissertation has been about exploring situations of precarity, uncertainty, aberrations and exceptions that exist within those efforts. For me, Tsing's approach resonates with Hartman's attempts to read the archive beyond what it reveals and with Rycroft's attempts to use conjectures to reclaim the political agency diminished by the photographic archive. Together, their questions and suggestions have structured the way I have approached photographic material in this dissertation.

Chapter one traced the possible histories of the *Images of India* exhibition, drawing on little threads linking it to *The Family of Man* and the PSI. In building potential histories from gaps and possibilities, the discussion on the *Images of India* exhibition invoked the local, national and transnational registers of this exhibition. In the chapter, I elaborated on the linear optics produced by the state as a self-image, while tying the indigenous groups in a static-circular frame. I also discussed about the image of the welfare state created through the visualisation of problems or 'lack'. *The Family of Man'*s universal humanism has been criticised for diminishing difference and for being ahistorical. Along the lines of Tamar Garb's essay which articulates how the universal humanistic rhetoric signified inclusion into a supposed 'human family' in a colour-divided Johannesburg,[732] this chapter has situated the *Images of India* exhibition in the historical contradictions of India's post-1947 situation. Until now, there has been no substantial work on the flourishing photography networks of amateur photography clubs in India in the twentieth century. I have briefly touched upon what appears to be a potential minefield of new

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[727] Ibid.

[728] Ibid., 24.

[729] Ibid., 20.

[730] Ibid., 23.

[731] Ibid., 23.

[732] Garb, 'Rethinking Sekula from the Global South,' 50.

research on Indian photographic histories related to camera clubs and amateur photography in that period.

Chapter two traces the history of rural development programs through an aberration. I have studied an album that claims to be a propaganda album but effectively does the opposite - reveals the inadequacies of state vision. The value of this album is in its ability to encapsulate several layers of seeing and showing through photographs. The PWD engineers have photographically documented the village and the villagers, and curated their vision into an album narrative, to be given to Nehru as a way of 'showing' their work. As an expected viewer of the album, Nehru is implicated in 'seeing' the engineers through the photographs showing the village and the villagers. This complicated self-reflexivity in the album is further nuanced when one notices that the album often does not use photographs to show what it intends the viewer to see. In a way, the photographs are meant to do work other than just seeing. This chapter thus furthers the dissertation's intention of complicating photography's claim to 'seeing', arguing that photographic work is *not* just about seeing. Further, this chapter has explored the gaps in state vision through the prism of caste.[733] I anticipate this can be a useful approach to critically address the problems of photographic historiography and postcolonial scholarship in India, rearticulating the art historical and the postcolonial frame through the localised subaltern contestations on the ground.

Chapter three studied the archives as a filing cabinet of the state, imprinted with censorship, omissions and closures. Throughout, I attempted to define the BBMB archive through a subaltern lens – asking questions about what is missing and omitted. Freud's screen memory and Beck's writing on risk was useful to read official photographs for what they hide and replace, rather than what they show. By doing so, this dissertation created a 'counter photographic archive' of postcolonial modernity, one that nudges the modernising claims of architectural spectacles like Chandigarh. Modernity was not just about *constructing* a new postcolonial India, as is often claimed by art and architecture historians. It was equally about replacing, demolishing, displacing the existing in order to create the spectacle of the new! Through this chapter, I have attempted to situate the complicated histories of modernity and development within the broader discourse of postcolonial nation-building (and displacement).

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[733] I have consciously addressed only caste and displacement in this dissertation, to make an argument about structural omissions. However, exploring the other structural gaps would be valuable for further research.

Finally, chapter four studied the photographs produced during Nehru's famous visit to the Soviet Union in June 1955, to argue that within the diplomatic context of the Cold War, the photographs must be interpreted *not* for what they say or show explicitly but for what they hint at and aspire to. The interpretations revel in the space of the indeterminate, as I have assembled textual records, official briefs and diary recordings on the visit to ponder if the photographic album given to Nehru was more than just a farewell gift. Using 'conjectures' to access the diplomatic façade projected through documentary photography, I have argued that these photographs, instead of just being documentary records of a diplomatic visit, operate through the semiotic language of suspicion, aspiration, self-interest and underlying hostility that defined the Cold War context. As a contra-form to the Soviet-India diplomatic exchange, I discussed an album gifted to Nehru by Indonesian youth workers in 1947, towards the end of the chapter. The discussion on the Indonesian album is useful to highlight, *by difference*, the diplomatic nature of India's relation with the Soviet Union. Connecting back to the conversation on universal humanism in chapter one, the Indonesian album also shows the presence of photography as a tool in creating anti-colonial solidarities beyond the national space. The chapter ended with an invitation to study the photographic medium for its role as an international language capable of engendering de-colonial worldmaking after the fall of the Empire, thus reformulating the understanding of universal humanism post-World War II.

Before I end, I want to note that this dissertation is broadly an exploration of the photographic *optics* of development and modernity and not of development or of modernity per se. I have tried to operate with a layered understanding of development as a category, one that is more grey, rather than entirely black or white. While agreeing with the broader view that developmental modernity had its roots in a colonial 'saviour' complex and was embedded in a de-politicising intent, I have also tried to explore recent scholarship that sees the politicising potential of development and the incessant desire for developmental modernity (despite its failures) from below. I have attempted to engage with modernity from a similarly nuanced perspective. While modernity came to India through a colonial axis of knowledge and power, my attempt has also been to factor in a modernist articulation built on the anti-caste demand for equality that could counter caste-based hierarchies in Indian society (often ossified in the name of 'Tradition'). Gopal Guru has pointed out the articulation of modernity by Dalits in India, who sought emancipation in the modern language of rights, equality and justice while rejecting the 'pre-modern' language of caste obligation.[734] This desire for modernity, through the anti-caste lens, had its

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[734] Guru, 'Dalits in Pursuit of Modernity,' 123.

origins in both Indian and western emancipatory traditions.[735] While assessing developmental modernity, I have attempted to be mindful of these layered and complicated origins and usages.

Finally, postcolonial scholarship's oversight lies in its attempt to construct the power divide between the coloniser and the colonised, articulating the postcolonial experience through the central prism of colonialism. As a deficit of the broader field of postcolonial studies, this (mis)perception is also found in scholarship on postcolonial histories of art. This dissertation contributes to the scholarship on postcolonial studies by refusing to reduce the optical contradiction to the coloniser versus colonised binary, and in rejecting the frame of West/colonialism to investigate postcolonial optics. Instead, I have attempted to address the historical contradictions inherent in the local contexts accessible through the structural lens of caste (chapter two) and displacement (chapter three). Simultaneously, I have attempted to expand the understanding of the postcolonial nation to redefine it through its existence within a transnational framework in chapter one and four.

In continuation, art historical scholarship on Indian modernity needs to be structurally revisited through a critical subaltern lens. While there is (minimal) scholarship that does touch upon the question of caste, such conversations are often reduced to a discussion of artists who either came from oppressed caste or indigenous backgrounds or those who produce works that 'represent' the oppressed perspective as a measure of inclusion. Sadly, such art historical scholarship falls into the trap of looking at caste as a 'practice' of exclusion or as an atrocity and does not acknowledge the structural existence of caste in the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial Indian psyche. Art Historian Geeta Kapur recently revisited her well-regarded book *When was Modernism* that discusses modernity through visual art, and thoughtfully acknowledged, "I am now fully aware that (my book) was not able to move to the next stage of the argument: the language of rights, which must entail a much more radical interrogation of caste and class, state and capital.*"[736] This dissertation fundamentally intervenes in this space, reformulating photographic historiographies within the language of rights, integrating questions of caste and displacement into the writing of photographic modernity in postcolonial India.

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[735] Seeing the ideal of 'equality' not just as a product of western Enlightenment and modernity, I am choosing to see the work of several anti-caste reformers and activists across eighteenth and nineteenth century in India, who challenged Brahminical hierarchy and demanded the right to an 'equal' life, as articulating the Indian origins of modernity through the phenological experience of caste. Soumyabrata Choudhury has noted the ideal of radical equality espoused by Ambedkar and others in his recent work. See, Choudhury, *Ambedkar and Other Immortals*.

[736] The above quote is from an interview where she revisited her book. See, Mathur, 'Ends and Means: A Conversation with Geeta Kapur'. Accessed online on https://www.documenta-platform6.de/ends-and-means-a-conversation-with-geeta-kapur/. Retrieved on July 18, 2022. For the original text, Kapur*, When Was Modernism: Essays on Contemporary Cultural Practice in India.*

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