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NEPAL REDISCOVERED COURT LIFE 1846-1951

An exhibition of photographs from the archive of the Nepal Kingdom Foundation



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St. Pancras Library 100 Euston Road London NW1

Admission Free

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Shri Premdhar and Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha Collection.

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General Shri Dhan Shamsheer J B Rana and Family
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Princess Rama Malla
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Shri Premdhar & Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha

Introduction

The Shri Premdhar and Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha Collection

Dwarfed by the mighty Himalayas and bordered by the large land masses of India and China, the small Kingdom of Nepal has enjoyed a surprisingly peaceful history, unfettered by colonial conquest and, as befitting the birth place of Buddha, free from religious intolerance. This very stability no doubt contributed to the culmination in pomp and splendour of the Rana Court of Nepal from 1846 until its dissolution in 1951. It is therefore a considerable achievement by the Nepal Kingdom Foundation to have brought together for posterity the Shri Premdhar and Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha Collection: the source of the photographs reproduced in this exhibition. For these photographs secure for future generations a unique visual record of Court life during this period. While not a comprehensive historical account of the times 'Nepal Rediscovered' provides a fascinating glimpse into this now lost age only recently rediscovered through these remarkable photographs.

The Shrestha Collection has its origins in the photographs assembled by Shri Premdhar Shrestha, who as a Government treasurer in the court of Maharaja & Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher (1901-29) had access to the Royal Photographic Collections which dated back to the appointment of the very first official Court Photographer, Shri Bhajuman Chitraker, in the mid-19th century. Established during the premiership of Maharaja & Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana (1846-77) who had been impressed by Daguerre's recent invention of the camera on a visit to Europe in 1850, the Court Photographer superseded the traditional role of the Court Painter. Family albums of commissioned portraits soon became very popular and were still fashionable at the time Shri Premdhar Shrestha began collecting. With the support of his contemporaries at Court he compiled a collection of portraits whose value to Nepal's heritage became vividly apparent after the great earthquake of 1934 when many of the Royal Collections were tragically destroyed.

Indeed their significance was not lost upon Shri Padma Prakash Shrestha, the founder of the Nepal Kingdom Foundation, and the son of Shri Premdhar and Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha who had been brought up at home to savour Nepali culture. Once inherited by him the collection flourished as he combined his family's enthusiasm with studious research, and in recent years he has dedicated the collection to them. Assisted by his Tantric guru, General Shri Dhan Shamsher JB Rana, Padma sought photographs from high ranking members of the deposed Rana families who generously donated many items from their personal collections. He also collected old postcards from friends and retrieved fragile glass negatives innocently being used as decorative window panes. Encouraged also by his studies in Europe on Nepali art and literature, archaeology, photogrammetry, conservation and restoration, he realized how important such a body of work might be to art and social historians and how it might also establish a national cultural identity for the pride of Nepali people the world over. Shri Padma Prakash Shrestha hopes the Collection will help foster a reappraisal of the neglected history these photographs depict: acknowledge the revolutionary techniques adopted in the infancy of photography by the Court and civil photographers; encourage research into the changes in custom, dress and lifestyle witnessed in these photographs; and document the splendid architectural achievements of Nepali engineers and craftsmen.

It is to be hoped that the exhibition 'Nepal Rediscovered' will play a part in stimulating further research into, and enjoyment of, Nepal's great heritage.

Nepali Kings and Prime Ministers

Nepali Kings and Prime Ministers (Regnal Years in Brackets)

Maharaja and Prime Minister

Rajendra (1816-1847)
Surendra (1847-1881)

Prithvivar (1881-1911)

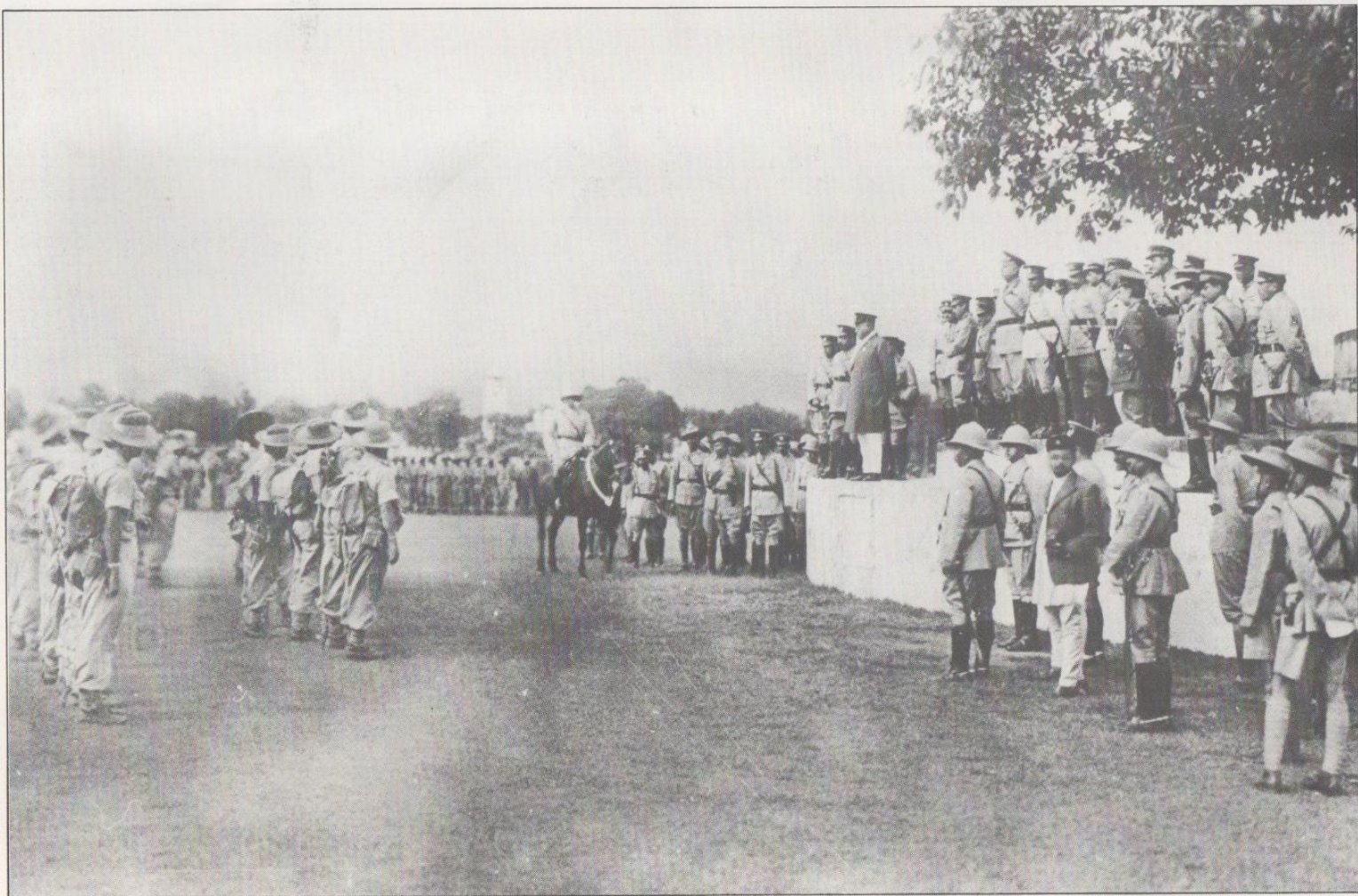
Tribhuvan (1911-1955)

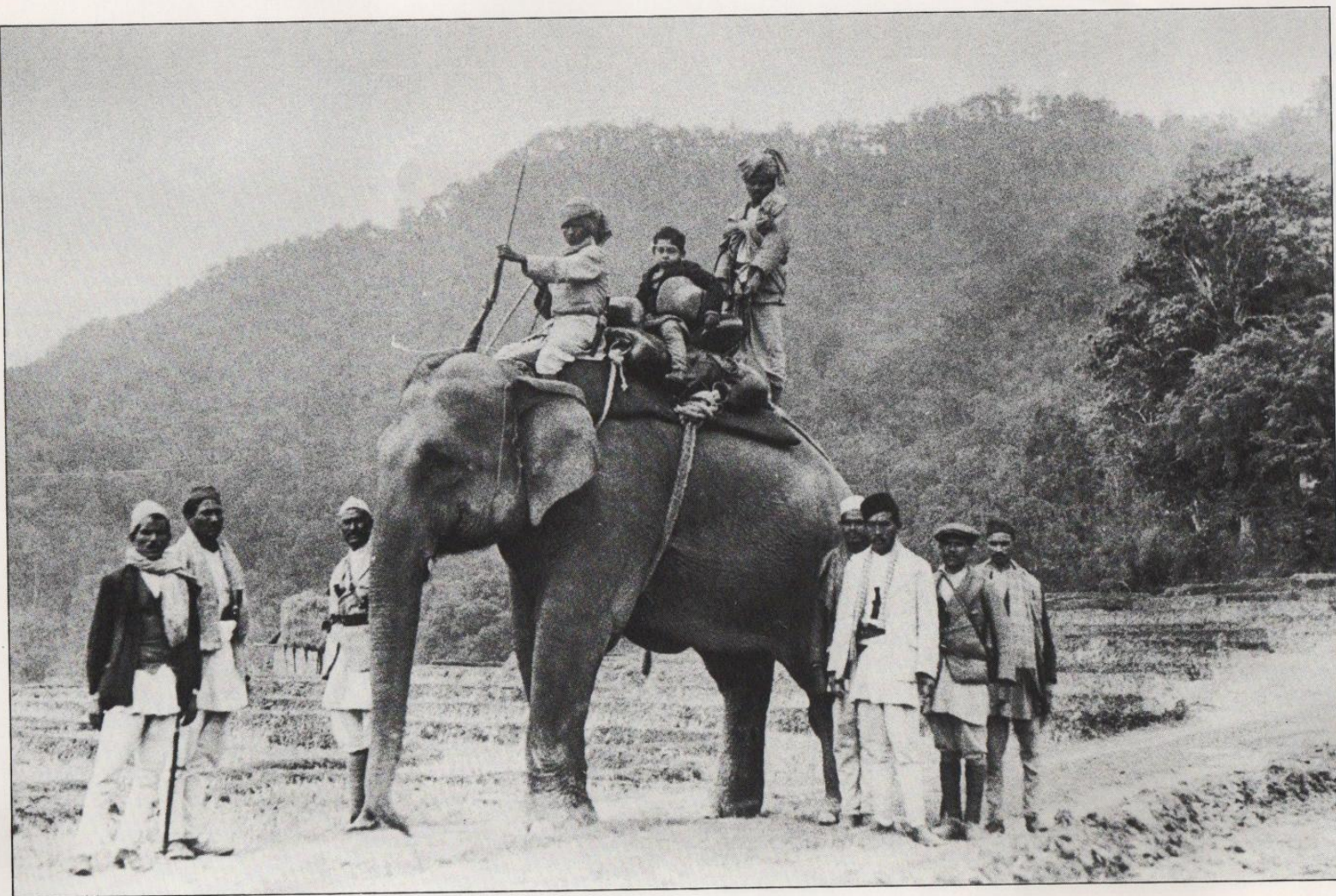
Jang Bahadur (1846-56 and 1857-77)
Bam Bahadur (1856-57)
Krishna Bahadur (acting PM for one month in 1857)
Ranoddip Singh (1877-1885)
Bir Shamsher (1885-1901)
Dev Shamsher (1901)
Chandra Shamsher (1901-1929)
Bhim Shamsher (1929-1932)
Juddha Shamsher (1932-1945)
Padma Shamsher (1945-1948)
Mohan Shamsher (1948-1951)

Jang Bahadur assumed the title of Maharaja of Kaski and Lamjung in 1856, after his resignation as Prime Minister. From his re-appointment in 1857 until the end of the Rana regime the offices of Prime Minister and Maharaja were always held simultaneously by one individual.









Catalogue

The Shri Premdhar and Srimati Gyan Kumari Shrestha Collection

- 1 Maharaja & Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher 1901-29
- 2 Maharaja & Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher 1932-45
- 3 Maharaja & Prime Minister Padma Shamsher 1945-48
- 4 Maharaja & Prime Minister Bhim Shamsher 1929-32
- 5 Maharaja & Prime Minister Mohan Shamsher 1948-51
- 6 Maharaja & Prime Minister Dev Shamsher 1901
- 7 Maharaja & Prime Minister Bir Shamsher 1885-1901
- 8 Maharaja & Prime Minister Ranoddip Singh 1877-85
- 9 Maharaja & Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana 1846-77
- 10 General Gahendra Shamsher and his wife c 1920
- 11 General Samar Shamsher and his wife
- 12 General Bahadur Shamsher and his first wife
- 13 Maharaja & Prime Minister Dev Shamsher and Court 1901
- 14 Maharaja & Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana on a hunting expedition in the 1870s
- 15 Maharaja & Prime Minister Bir Shamsher and family c 1890
- 16 Maharaja & Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher with his wives, children and brothers c 1910
- 17 Detail of above
- 18 Maharaja & Prime Minister Bir Shamsher with family and Court officials c 1885
- 19 Maharaja & Prime Minister Bhim Shamsher and family c 1930
- 20 King Tribhuvan (1911-55) with his son Crown Prince Mahendra (left) and Padma Shamsher (right) c 1945
- 21 Senior Ranas during Padma's premiership c 1945-48
- 22 Maharaja & Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher and his Maharani c 1901
- 23 Maharaja & Prime Minister Ranoddip Singh with his second Rani, Hari Priya Devi c 1877
- 24 Commander-in-chief Babar Shamsher, second son of Maharaja Chandra, with his wife
- 25 Maiya Maharani, wife of Maharaja Jang Bahadur c 1860
- 26 King Prithvibir's (1881-1911) third wife c 1885
- 27 Maharaja & Prime Minister Juddha Shamsher's Rani c 1900
- 28 Maharaja & Prime Minister Chandra Shamsher's mother, Kanchi Rani Sahib c 1880

- 29 Unidentified Rani c 1920
- 30 Sita Maharani, wife of Bhim Shamsheer c 1930
- 31 Unidentified Rani
- 32 Lalit Kumari, Rani of Padma Jang c 1890
- 33 Maharaja & Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer's granddaughter, Bonushah
- 34 Rani child c 1930
- 35 Maharaja & Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer's sons Min and Ravi c 1930
- 36 Maharaja & Prime Minister Juddha Shamsheer's great grandson Prabhakar (b1935)
- 37 General Pratap Shamsheer and family c 1920
- 38 Maharani, sons and daughters c 1910
- 39 Rana child
- 40 High ranking Court officials c 1900
- 41 Members of the Royal household c 1900
- 42 A group of Royal servants c 1900
- 43 Court musicians
- 44 A tax collector and aides
- 45 High ranking official with his family and servants c 1900
- 46 Visiting mission from China with Nepali generals c 1880
- 47 Edward VII of Great Britain (then Prince of Wales) with Maharaja & Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana, visiting Nepal on a hunting expedition c 1870s
- 48 Japanese ambassador and wife (?) with Maharaja & Prime Minister Bhim Shamsheer c 1930
- 49 Maharaja Chandra's son General Kaiser Shamsheer (centre), ambassador in London between 1946 and 1948, on the steps of the Royal Nepali embassy in Kensington Palace Gardens
- 50 The French tennis star, Jean Borotra (far left) and party in front of an Air France plane at Kathmandu Airport
- 51 King Tribhuvan (right) receiving the Dalai Lama of Tibet accompanied by the Maharaja & Prime Minister Padma Shamsheer (far left) and Crown Prince Mahendra
- 52 American, Belgian, British and French Ambassadors with Maharaja & Prime Minister Padma Shamsheer in front of the Gallery Baithak at Singh Darbar c 1940
- 53 Prime Minister Nehru of India (far left) with (l to r) King Tribhuvan, President Rajendra Prasad of India and Crown Prince Mahendra 1951

