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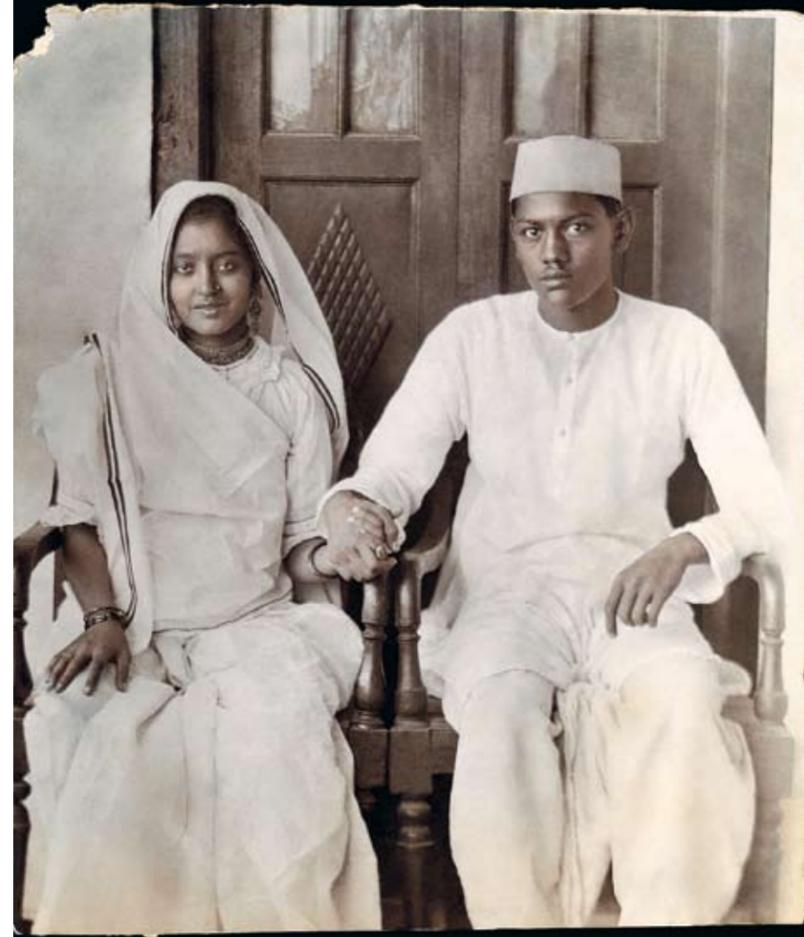
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A Portrait of India

► Ordinary photographs of everyday people can tell us as much about the past as history books, Anusha Yadav, curator of The Indian Memory Project, tells Shiva Kumar Thekkepat



As they say, every picture tells a story. The tales of this family with a royal connection, above, and a woman who travelled from Scotland to marry in India, are told on the following pages



Holding hands was a simple yet defiant move for Chameli and Phoolchand Jain, top, in 1923. Above, a proud record of six sisters, all triple degree holders



Anusha Yadav, who set up the Indian Memory Project

It was a scandal of sorts in 1920s pre-independent India. A teenage couple – Chameli and Phoolchand Jain – holding hands in a photograph.

“She was 14 and he was 16,” says New Delhi-based journalist Sreenivasan Jain of his paternal grandparents. “It was unusual for couples in our family to even be photographed, especially holding hands, which turned out to be an indication of the unconventional direction their lives would take.

“Both were inspired by Mahatma Gandhi’s principles of fighting against oppression and illogical social norms of the time.”

The image, left, was taken in Delhi, shortly after their marriage in 1923. While the two look like any other young married couple, the defiant act of holding hands said a lot about their future paths.

“My grandmother Chameli Devi Jain was from a deeply conservative family. She became the first Jain – an Indian religion that prescribes a path of non-violence towards all living beings – woman in her neighbourhood to go to jail while fighting for freedom [and] was named on the day of her arrest in the *Hindustan Times* with all the other satyagrahis (freedom fighters)...” writes Sreenivasan, of his grandmother in whose name the prestigious Chameli Devi Jain Award for Journalists has been instituted in India.

The picture and Sreenivasan’s narrative serve to fill an important chapter in the history of India’s freedom struggle – how ordinary people fought against the British and succeeded in their own small way.

We all play our part in history

Most Indians have grown up reading about stories of maharajas and maharanis, exotic invaders and brave leaders in text books or historical novels. But would the history of a country ever be complete without the stories of the common people who make up the nation?

This was a thought that obsessed Anusha Yadav, a narrative photographer, photo archivist and book designer. “No matter what he or she does, or how long they live for, everyone on this planet plays a central role in the history of the world,” she says in her preface to the Indian Memory Project (www.indianmemoryproject.com). That was why she decided to collect and curate old photographs.

What gave the project shape was the advent of Facebook with its photo posting feature and



A royal connection

Left image: My great grandfather, Raja Janampally Rameshwar Rao II, the Raja of Wanaparthy with sons Krishna Dev Rao (left) and Ram Dev Rao (right). Right image: Krishna Dev Rao (left) with sister, Janamma, and brother Ram Dev Rao. Wanaparthy, Andhra Pradesh, circa 1912.

My great grandfather Raja Rameshwar Rao II (seated) was the ruler with the title Raja of Wanaparthy, a region of Hyderabad state that was ruled by the Nizam. In 1866, at

the request of the Nizam, my great grandfather allied his army, the Bison Division Battalion, with the Nizam's army called the Hyderabad Battalion. He was appointed the Inspector of the Army. My great grandfather died on November 22, 1922, and was survived by two sons, Krishna Dev Rao and Ram Dev Rao. Ram Dev Rao (the younger boy in the image) was my grandfather.

After the end of the British reign in India, The Nizam wanted to be independent of India. So the Government of India in 1948 launched

a police action against Hyderabad and forced the Nizam to accede to India and surrender.

Subsequent to Hyderabad State's merger with the Indian Union in 1948, all units of the Hyderabad State Forces were disbanded and only volunteers of the Battalion were absorbed into the Indian Army.

Images and text contributed by Kamini Reddy, USA

its access to people all over the world. "Initially, I thought it would be a good idea to source pictures of marriages from people to research a book on Indian weddings," Anusha says. "With the innumerable diverse cultures within India, it would have made a most interesting book. I wanted to research ceremonies and traditions, all that are gradually disappearing behind the curtain of the Bollywood-style quick-fix yet elaborate weddings. I was hoping I wouldn't be the only one interested and I wasn't mistaken."

But apart from wedding photographs, people began posting all kinds of old pictures with interesting anecdotes on the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/indianmemoryproject) she set up in 2009. "Almost everyone had an interesting story, an accomplishment they wanted to share," she says. "It did occur to me that these images were the only form of any

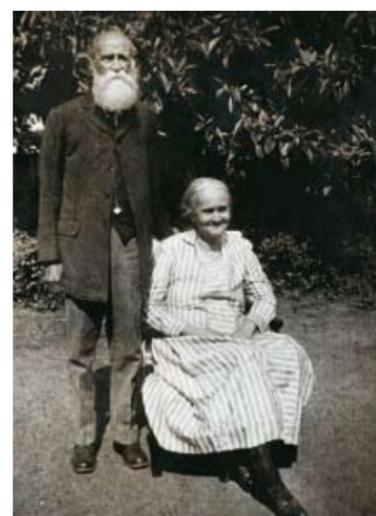
documentation of a personal history, which if suffixed with narratives can open a whole unknown world about our lives. And I guess that's when the bulb went off, there was more to it than I had thought.

"In my mind, if I were to put 20 pictures of a city following a certain timeline side by side, it would give me a fair idea about its history! A collection of pictures from different cities of the country can offer the essence of a nation or even a continent."

A personal perspective

In 2010 Anusha expanded the group out of Facebook. "With only 15 stories, and with the help of a free blog, I formally founded Indian Memory Project," she says.

She decided on an accessible format for recording a layperson's memories in the form



Six generations of a British family in India

Left: My great great grandparents Edwin Ebenezer Scott (1850-1931) and Emily Good Andre (1862-1946), Bangalore, 1915.

Right: My great grandparents, Algernon Edwin Scott and Desiree Leferve with my grandfather, Bert Scott, as a boy. Cannanore, then in Karnataka, now in Kerala, 1919.

These are two photographs from my grandfather Bert Scott's family album. The photograph on the left, of my great great grandparents Edwin and Emily Scott, was taken on Christmas day in 1915 at 3 Campbell road, Richmond Town, Bangalore, our family's house, which was one of the old British bungalows and has sadly like many of the rest, been demolished. On the old ground now stands St Philomena's Hospital, right in the very heart of Bangalore.

On the right, are my great

grandparents Algernon Edwin Scott and Desiree Leferve with my grandfather, Bert Scott, as a two or three-year-old boy, the image was taken in 1919 in Cannanore, Karnataka (now Kannur in Kerala).

My family came to India in 1798 when James Scott Savory joined the East India Company as a writer of the Records of State. Edwin Ebenezer is his great great grandson. Bert Scott, my grandfather, was born in Bangalore in 1915. He went to Bishop Cottons School before he joined the *Times of India* in 1936 as a press photographer. He was in position on August 14, 1947, to photograph the hand over of power and watched as the Mountbattens left Viceregal Lodge (now Rashtrapati Bhavan). *Image and text contributed by Jason Scott Tilley, Birmingham, UK*

Mary Jane shoes with a nine-yard saree

My maternal grandparents, Lokanayaki and RR Hariharan, from Ravanamudram, Tirunelveli district, Tamil Nadu, circa 1920.

He worked with the Indian Railways in various parts of India, and she raised their five children in Delhi and Shimla, learning Hindi and the ways of the 'north' as she went along.

This photograph was probably taken soon after they were married. Even my mum doesn't remember them like this at all. So in a sense, they are both familiar and strangers as they appear in the picture.

My favourite part of the photograph is that Paati (grandmother, in Tamil) is wearing Mary Jane shoes and white socks with her nine-yard sari. I've heard that my grandfather used to wear a suit, with the pants clipped with bicycle clips as he rode to work.

Image and text contributed by Vani Subramanian, New Delhi

of pictures or postcards. "The Indian Memory Project is an online, curated, visual and oral history-based archive that traces the personal history of the Indian subcontinent, its people, cultures, professions, cities, development, traditions, circumstances and their consequences," says Anusha, 37.

"With images, letters and stories from family archives, it reconstructs a visual history that is emotionally rich, vivid, informative and even more surprising than we think."

Anusha has always believed family archives of photographs and letters are a treasure trove of valuable information. "They hold astonishing secrets, and when they reveal themselves via narratives, they become the missing links to a country's emotional history. A past we can actually feel, connect and wonder with."

The fact she had to move from Facebook to

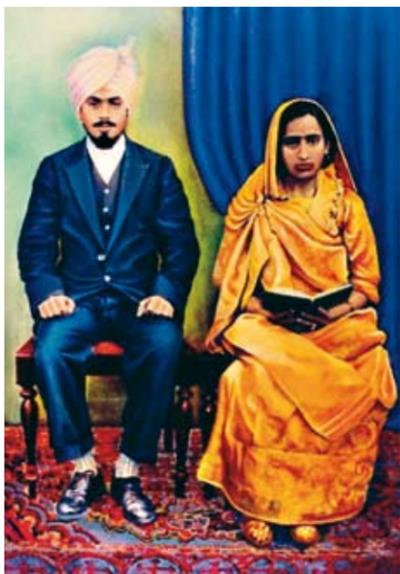
a blog and then on to her own website within a span of months shows how many people connected with her idea. Now the website averages 800 hits a day. "With every new post, the daily hits go up to 2,000, sometimes even 6,000 depending on the post and sharing."

The website is most popular in India, Pakistan, Dubai, the UK and USA. Anusha now spends two to three hours a day curating the pictures. "It is my primary priority, but not my primary job," she explains. "I am also a photographer and a publication designer, and I need the money from that to feed the archive."

The power to amaze

What is it about old photographs that pique our interest even if it's not about people we know or even have heard/read about? "Because they make us wonder," says Anusha. "The real story





Left his Rolls behind

My maternal grandparents are photographed in Lahore, Pakistan, 1923. The picture was hand painted in New York in 2000.

Balwant Goindi, a Sikh, and Ram Pyari, a Hindu, married in 1923. She was re-named Mohinder Kaur after her marriage. They went on to have eight daughters, one of whom is my mother, and two sons.

Balwant Goindi was a wealthy man and owned a Rolls-Royce. During Partition, he and his family came to Delhi, India, without any of his precious belongings; assuming he would return after the situation had calmed down. *Image and text contributed by Dinesh Khanna.*



She left everything in Scotland for an unknown future in India

This is a photo of my Scottish maternal grandmother Sydney Gorrie (née Easterbrook) on her wedding day in December 1923. She and my grandfather, Robert Gorrie, were married in a cathedral in Lahore.

She looks beautiful but perhaps to me, also slightly apprehensive. This may be because she hadn't seen her fiancé in over a year and had just travelled out by ship with her parents from Edinburgh, Scotland, to get married.

For some time their home was in Lahore, which my grandmother enjoyed. Robert Gorrie, fondly called Bob, a veteran of the First World War, had secured a job with the Indian Forestry Service as a conservator of forests. Sydney was an only child and had left behind home and extended family in Edinburgh for an unknown future trekking around the Himalayan foothills with her new husband.

Bob was enthusiastic about trees and conservation and became an expert on soil erosion. He worked all over Punjab and the remote foothills of the

Himalayas, and my grandmother would have to plan and organise camping trips for a month or so at a time.

When my mother was born, she was taken along too; her pram hoisted onto poles and carried along jungle paths. According to his Work Records, Scottish Bob was "a tiger for work" but was impatient with the bureaucracy and criticised for being outspoken.

My granny would sigh that she was constantly having to 'smooth the ruffled feathers' of the administrators. My grandparents' stories were the inspiration for my own trip to India. When I was 18, I went overland in a bus to Kathmandu via Pakistan and India. In Lahore I sent my granny a postcard. What I didn't know was that she had had a stroke and was in the hospital.

The last time my mother saw her alive was the day my postcard arrived. She was able to read it to Granny. I grew up to become an author and wrote a mystery novel based on my overland trip in the 1970s, called *The Vanishing of Ruth*.

Image and text contributed by Janet MacLeod Trotter, United Kingdom



English love in the time of war

My parents Ronald and Beryl Osbourne at Kohat Pass (North West Frontier Province), Pakistan, April 1946.

I first learned of the Indian Memory Project from an article in *The Australian* of May 2011 (a daily newspaper in Australia). I felt a brief glimpse of Indian Army life from the viewpoint of a British officer and his family in 1945-46 may shed a personal light on that brief moment in time just before the watershed of Independence.

This image is of my parents taken on April 23, 1946. My mother is sporting a revolver! My father Ronald Osbourne was born in Wales in 1910 and volunteered for the British Army in 1939 just before universal conscription was introduced. He served initially with the Royal Engineers then chose to be commissioned into the Royal Indian Army Service Corps.

My mother Beryl (née Beardsley) was born in 1910 and grew up in Derbyshire. She moved to London as a young woman, where she met and married my father.

Image and text contributed by John Reese-Osbourne, Australia

is not necessarily in the frame, but outside of it. The frame offers a point of context."

While the subject may be a simple family portrait, the attitude, position of the people, their dress, and even the style of photography may reveal a lot about the period when it was taken.

Several thoughts about preserving memories through pictures used to come to mind while leafing through old family albums, Anusha says. Chance remarks and her photography experience slowly took the shape of the Indian Memory Project. "Photographs are a way to time-travel and imagine how it must have been, what experiences the characters in the picture would have had," she says. "I have no formal education in art history or anthropology, but have always been interested in both."

Anusha graduated in Communication Design from the National Institute of Design, India's



The six triple degree holding sisters of Agra

My mother Shalini (middle, bottom) and her sisters Kusum, Madhavi, Suman, Aruna and Nalini. Agra, Uttar Pradesh, 1961-1971.

They are holding their graduation degrees with pride as it was the custom at the time for women to be photographed to prove that they were educated. Some of these images were also then used as matrimonial pictures.

All the sisters were born between 1935 and 1946 and brought up in Raja Mandi, Agra in Uttar Pradesh. There were also four brothers, the eldest of whom is Rajendra Yadav, a foremost writer in Hindi. My grandfather, Mishri Lal, was a very well respected doctor, with a signature white horse that he rode when out on rounds, and

my grandmother, Tara, his second wife, hailed from Maharashtra with a royal lineage.

All sisters were highly educated, triple graduates and each was formally trained in embroidery, shooting, first aid, swimming, horse-riding, music, dance, crafts and cooking.

As kids, my sisters, my cousins and I learnt a lot, from each and every one of these women. They were all feisty, fiercely talented and encouraged us to read Hindi and English literature, we were trained in classical and folk music and dances, embroidery, painting and cooking – first at home and then some of us were sent to schools to further that knowledge. *Image and text contributed by Anusha Yadav, founder of the Indian Memory Project, Mumbai*

premier design school, and then worked for 16 years as a graphic designer before turning to photography.

There was no intention to compile the photographs in a book, or expand it into an exhibition. Once the penny dropped, Anusha wanted it to be 'a free online, cross-referenced, visual and narrative archive'.

The reason? "The internet has great power," says Anusha. "It can spread information like nothing ever before. And for me the more people see it, the better. What better medium?"

Many social commentators have likened the project as a sign of the times – it's almost like oral history accompanied by physical evidence.

"I am not sure if it's the sign of the times, but yes some kind of proof or context is what makes the project very exciting," says Anusha. "So much so that now a few people from two or



1962



Members of an all-girl rock band

My mother Anupa Jacob (nee Nathaniel) (right) with her friend Shalini Gupta, Delhi, 1962.

My mother was from the small town of Nasirabad near Ajmer. Her father was orphaned when a plague hit the village. He and many others were then adopted by the British. Those who were adopted were given the last name 'Nathaniel'. From Nathu Singh, my grandfather became Fazal Masih Nathaniel.

My mother married my father Philip Jacob in 1968. Shalini, along with some friends, formed Delhi University's first girl rock band called 'Mad Hatter'. My mother was the lead guitarist and singer. Because of that status, when the Beatles performed, albeit privately in Delhi in 1966, the Mad Hatters were given front seats priority.

My mother died in 1986.
Image and text contributed by Anisha Jacob Sachdev, New Delhi

1970



Taking the Miss India crown

Veena Sajnani, winner of the Miss India crown in Bombay, Maharashtra, 1970.

I was a fashion model in 1970 and toured with the *Femina* – a lifestyle magazine – group all over India doing fashion shows for textile firms and others. Our salary was Rs150 (Dh10) per show and after 20 shows we would go home with a princely sum of Rs3000 (Dh200).

We were only ten models and we knew each other well, we travelled together and had a lot of fun. One such day that year, when rehearsals for fashion shows had begun, I was told I was no longer required for the show. Very upset and being a newbie with all the hotshot models of Bombay, I presumed it was because I had made a mistake. But no. Apparently I had been selected to participate in the Miss India 1970

beauty pageant. Funny part was, I hadn't even applied for it! I then found out that Meher Mistry (who became Miss India in 1964) and Persis Khambatta (was Miss India in 1965 and acted in *Star Trek*) who were close friends, had filled in the application form for me because they felt I had a chance to win.

Before the day of the pageant, we were asked to come to the *Times of India* office terrace (parent company of *Femina*) in a swimsuit and be photographed in it, because in those days, judges looked at pictures instead of the actual girls in swimsuits; and we were saved the embarrassment of coming on stage in swimsuits.

During the interval, the judges came backstage to check us out and since it was dark they had flashlights and our photos in their hands! We all giggled through the ordeal but in retrospect it was better than walking out half naked under full lights.

Persis and Meher on the other hand, were walking for the fashion show on the contest day and were most enthusiastic about my winning. So much so that Persis decided to do some sleuthing to find out how I was faring. She must have had superb vision because she said she could see the ratings and it was number 6, my number! We all pooh-poohed but sure enough when the winner was announced it was indeed number 6! Me. I had beaten Zeenat Aman (who later became a famous movie star).

(Veena Sajnani went on to become a popular theatre and film actor)
Image and text contributed by Veena Sajnani and her niece Smita Sajnani, Bengaluru

three other countries intend to follow the same format as the Indian Memory Project. Nepal is already on its way, while Estonia and Iran have expressed interest.”

So far 150 photographs have been sent by contributors, of which 84 have been curated. “The more people read about it, the more they are inspired to send in images,” says Anusha. However, not all of them make the cut. “I think what the image evokes is important. The image that holds a special meaning to the contributor matters, because you can sense the attachment. And an image that makes you want to look at it and get lost in it, matters. I also implement an emotional understanding to the images rather than just a logical curatorial one.”

Anusha has no favourites. “Each one is a clue to an unknown history, a missing piece to a huge puzzle. All images and narratives are important, they each add another layer, another clue to our history, so there is no best, they are

all pieces of a puzzle that's yet to be completed. The stories differ, times, people and cultures differ, some are elaborate some are not.”

Anusha sees the Indian Memory Project as an organic entity, growing on its own. “Sometimes even I'm not sure where it's headed. However, I do know where I would like it to go – to become a permanent online storehouse of memories. But the offshoots – an exhibition, or books – will be part of the project too.

“The Indian Memory Project found a life of its own, way larger, way more exciting than I even thought. And if that is the nature of its life, it must be allowed to do so. People have found ancestors, common spaces, acquaintances, common ground because of a project like this.

“I never even imagined that would happen. But it did.”

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i INSIDE INFO

Anybody who has photographs or letters dated prior to 1991 can upload them on the website www.indianmemoryproject.com along with a short write-up about the history surrounding the piece. The contribution will be curated and if found suitable, added to the archive.