

The Aftermath of Digitization:
Studying the Synecdochic Photograph
from the British Raj

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In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes describes the photographic image as one invested with an 'evidential force'; it bears testimony to its subject and the time when the photograph was taken.¹ In this article, I would like to argue that in the second half of the nineteenth century, a particular kind of photograph appeared that attempted to capture the essence of its subject. The image spoke not only of what lay within its frame, but attempted to speak for the body of which the subject was representative. I would like to refer to this image as the synecdochic photograph. This article situates this specific form of the photograph in the context of the empirical discourse practised in South Asia at the time, and examines its role in the state-forming machinery of the colonial enterprise. The paper continues to assess the possibilities of analyzing digital collections using the synecdochic photograph; it argues that this form of the photographic image allows for an atypical mode of examination that is separate from other computerized image analysis techniques. The proposed axioms are illustrated through examples from *The People of India* volumes published between 1868 and 1875 by John Forbes Watson and John William Kaye.²

The past decade has seen a steady increase in digitization activities across the world. Both academic institutions and organizations involved in the preservation of cultural artefacts