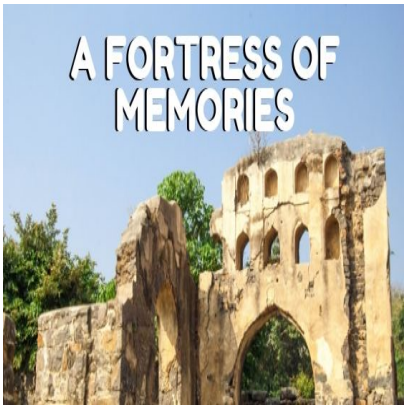


A FORTRESS OF MEMORIES

Description

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(Walking amidst the ruins of the Kondapalli Fort triggered long-forgotten memories and events, but a few anecdotes stood the test of time, age and friendship. But I wondered how these memories have survived for decades to resurrect as I stood in the forest terrain on an early autumn morning.)

It surprised me as there is no speeding rush of the Sunday merrymakers, on the narrow asphalt road leading to the top of the hill. The way leads to a vast clearing fringed by green trees, barren rocks, and hills forming a canopy with their thickest spread of bushes and small trees. On the other edge stood the thirteenth-century fort, popularly known as Kondapalli Fort â?? a sketchy assembly of boulders, the remains of dilapidated walls of the ancient ruins after surviving decades of neglect, and disrepair.

The uncared-for columns scattered among the ruins, defying gravity stood isolated as if praying gloomily to the sky. The extent of manâ??s destructive negligence is evident in a huge banyan tree cracking into the walls, its arms like roots entwining the bedrocks â?? a rare symbiosis â?? each supporting the other not to crumble.

Together with the shadowy junctions of bare walls struck together by coarse branches create many hideouts for blind dates, which on holidays become a romantic sanctuary for privacy starved teenaged souls.

The magnificent conglomeration of the ruined fort stands grandly; enjoying at its feet the second-largest city Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh, in India. From the hilltop, we

can also see through the hazy mist the river Krishna, like a huge sleeping cobra, the fourth biggest, 1400 kilometers Long River in India, embracing the city by its smooth, seductive curves.

A slow walk through the grand ruins triggers long-forgotten memories and events but something excited me as a few anecdotes pleasantly cradle in my memory: particularly two excursions I had taken part that happened four decades earlier.

Long back the town I lived was awfully out of place from what I feel proud of it today. Iâ??m relating to how life and things stood fifty years before. The roads were crooked, narrow, and badly maintained. Decent transportation was hard to find to move from any place. Found then are frequent potholes, fewer motor cars, and feeble traffic on the roads. A cluster of cycle rickshaws assembled at the street ends, which plied as a popular mode of mobility. I remember enjoying a ride with my mother on her monthly errands as the rickshaw peddled down the rickety roads.

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My son now a father himself, let out an incredulous scream when I shared the stuff of old times that it took three to five years to have a phone connection at home. Hard to believe today, but then telephones appeared bulky, connected by a wire placed in a corner â?? itâ??s the unforgettable rotary dial telephone, sat over an overused diary where the phone numbers jotted in alphabetical order. People rushed to the local post office to send letters or telegrams or made trunk calls in case of urgency.

Same was the fate of one or two models of cars on the market or scooters displayed behind the glass doors. To own them, we had to register first and pay an advance and wait three or four years before they got delivered, until then we had the luxury ride on the rickshawâ??s bouncing down or settled for the bone-breaking public transport.

My father was an avid reader, after a brief stay in the USA between 1964-69, compelled to return to India owing to his joint household problems of his brothers and fifteen or more siblings. Ignoring the noisy ambiance as a ten-year-old, Iâ??m found grasping wide-eyed the two illustrative magazines â??the Span and the Life,â?? he received from the US embassy, at the then Madras city. The American magazines had an odd size like a table mat, where each page of the general interest magazines filled with lively photographs of places colorfully printed on a rich art paper. Admiring the richness of exotic places, I assumed, it sowed the first seeds of initiation for the English language in my mind in all its innocence.

I was perhaps ten when I figured out the subtle joys of friendship when I clung to a few nicest kids in our classroom. We had the most genial, good-natured class teacher; she had encouraged us to relax, laugh, and allowed the whole class to move like a big

family.

If I dwell on memories of old friends, a warm smile appears on my lips, a swell in my heart. We are a gang of four; a girl among us who is fiercely independent and warm affection swam in her eyes.

We four went on a trek to the wild unknown forest terrain, climbed up to the Kondapalli Fort; we were twelve years old then. What prompted us to go; how we had planned to make such an adventurous risk on foot, I donâ??t have any clue now? But imagine the closeness and careless streak in us at an age and time where one piercing look, tough finger-pointing by the parents was enough for our knees to collapse, wet our pants and let loose a deluge in our eyes?

Whatever the reprimands we had sustained subsequently, we had realized that we were perfect for each other, had enough love in our hearts to fight for and defend what counts as good for us. Fifty-five years later, we still hold the same loving rhythm inside us, although we stay miles apart.

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I found my way out among the ruins, avoiding the thickly grown bushes, boulders strewn all over, wary of snakes that might arise from the undergrowth. I came out of the first episode of my memory, those were my childhood emotional souvenirs showcased in my deep recesses.

The second episode triggered a different nostalgia when I comforted myself on a rock looking over a dried-up pond. Forty-five years back, I was a dwarfed ten years old among the college group of students of more than a hundred. My father and his colleague accompanied the youthful group, to the same Kondapalli forest terrain, to explore the evergreens, the floral diversity, and the botanical secrets of age-old forest, shrubs, plants, leaves, buds, and flowers.

I was too young to appreciate such a serene wilderness but sat at a safe distance from the pond and skipped small pebbles into it.

The same pond that was serene and untouched when I sat on its earthen bank decades before remained neglected, today resembled a huge dump yard stinking with discarded materials, putrefying leftovers, polluted and abused â?? the death of once a lovely pond was complete and hopeless.

I wondered how the memories of these two visits to the same forest location had survived for decades in the deep turmoil of my mind like a bucket got sunk at the bottom of a deep well forgotten and abandoned.

Dislodging the nostalgic mental journals, I have jerked myself into a warm morning ambiance, trotted amidst the green vicinity, reaching closer to the lush verdant hills. One remarkable, appreciable fact: the hills stood cozily guarding the old fort, untouched by the onslaught of the polluted towns, cities that has grown circling the forest terrain.

Relishing the old memories, I felt, at the time, unexcited to focus, to click, as is my habitual take, on the flowers and the foliage blossomed on the hills, the trees taking their roots into huge rocks and spread the branches wide as if fanning the sky. Or the ramparts of the ancient ruins warmly glowing in the morning sunshine, nothing appeared special, today; it felt like an odd deja vu feeling.

Walking down the twisted narrow road, on one side itâ??s a steep valley rolling down and on the other was the rocky slope of the hills made of disorderly stacked rocks, and an assortment of stones most of them in weathered brownish tinge. I scanned the rocks closely that sprawled in a crooked yet I noticed a pattern how they hugged themselves together, deep cracks separating the rhythm of their packed closeness. Curious it may seem, sprouting around them, out from the cracks I noticed a surreal ecosystem, delicate soft textures, and patterns doodling before my eyes. It revealed a joy of new floral life â?? grass, tender shoots, and creepers protruding out from the chaotic rocks and swaying to the cool breezing flowing down the path.

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I let my eyes enjoy the ambiance, the fluttering of leaves, the gentle breeze whistling around, and the soft roar of motorbikes having the fun of the romantic souls hurrying up the road. I settle in cool unhurriedness seeing the carefree buzzing of butterflies swimming in the air.



I couldnâ??t have asked for a better friendly day, to click the togetherness between the living joys among the plants and the embedded beauty of the rocks and the magic passing in between and my camera didnâ??t waste a minute to filter the flashes of reality and amazement.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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