

BOATS AND A MORNING

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(Although I jumped into the task, rather impulsively, to take photographs on the shores of River Krishna in a pre-dawn setting, I realized later that I have to drive through the thick of the Covid virus restricted zone. However, I celebrated my pre-dawn session with the men of the River: visually fusing the boats, the men, the River, and the appealing hues of the monsoon morning. And read my strong experience in words.)

For the last two years, I have had made many photographic excursions to the River Krishna in our city. It has become a subdued discipline, a delightful way to spend the Sundays that you notice a childish zeal evident in the preparations that come before where I plan and pack for the outing.

I get so engrossed with the thrill when I eye through the camera the ferocious tide of the River. Standing on the shore, staring at its intriguing wonders, I love to watch the greenish-blue waters, flowing swift and strong. So each time I share a photograph locking the swirling waters in all its fury, â??you have to be careful near the water, take care,â?• a few caring friends hand out a concern. I prize those little tingles of love lent by loyal souls. It makes me think; they convey a good enough affinity â?? a few fond buddies concerned about the situation Iâ??m in â?? alone and retired.

Usually, I drive far beyond the cityâ??s outskirts; of course, I wouldnâ??t travel alone; I enlist a companion with a prior arrangement. Often, I reach up to the riverside, taking any track of one of the many villages that flank the coast.

One day a quirky idea struck me. How about snapping the images of boats â?? moored and shimmering in a pre-dawn ambiance? Before they rush for the dayâ??s fishing expedition.

For the mission, I select a shoreline that lies farther away from the crowd. And I knew a shore-side which from dawn to dusk dominated by the bustle of the fishermen and the buzzing boats.


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The stunt requires a lot of planning; besides, no one would team with me at that remote spell: to ally as early as four in the morning. Nevertheless, my enthusiasm didnâ??t give away and kept me awake watching at the clock lest I may slip into unforgivable slumber.

Thankfully, having not missed the alarm bell, I sleepwalked into my car, revved up the engine, and yawned so loudly that I felt my jaws would fall apart. Suddenly, I realized the drive was to go through covid-19 restricted zones; I was a little hesitant; however, having domiciled in the city for an excess of five decades, the confidence drove me ahead into dark empty routes. Along the semi-lit deserted lanes, I find shops shuttered and heavily padlocked. Though traffic was near empty, the ominous presence of police vehicles at strategic locations prompted me to pump the accelerator slow and vigilant. I wondered, now fully awake, â??Am I driving through a zombie-infested street.â?• Such was the aftermath of the Covid scare!

I park my car, collect the camera gear, and one distant look at the River shrouded in darkness; I felt edgy and thought, â??Am I possibly much before the hour than safe to be here.â?? The sloping steps down toward the coastline were dim and damp. I got a feeling did I think right to be here, at this forbidding hour, groping around to set up the camera where nothing seemed visible except some vague figures sleeping on the steps. In the darkness, I have to find something firm to place the tripod.

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There was nothing but yawning silence all around blended with the shadows and I turned a tickle scary. I recollect I had a word from my friend to join me. But helplessly imagine what fool would rise at four in the morning and go with me and watch me wait at a remote place holding the camera, to catch the morning lights of a new brand day.


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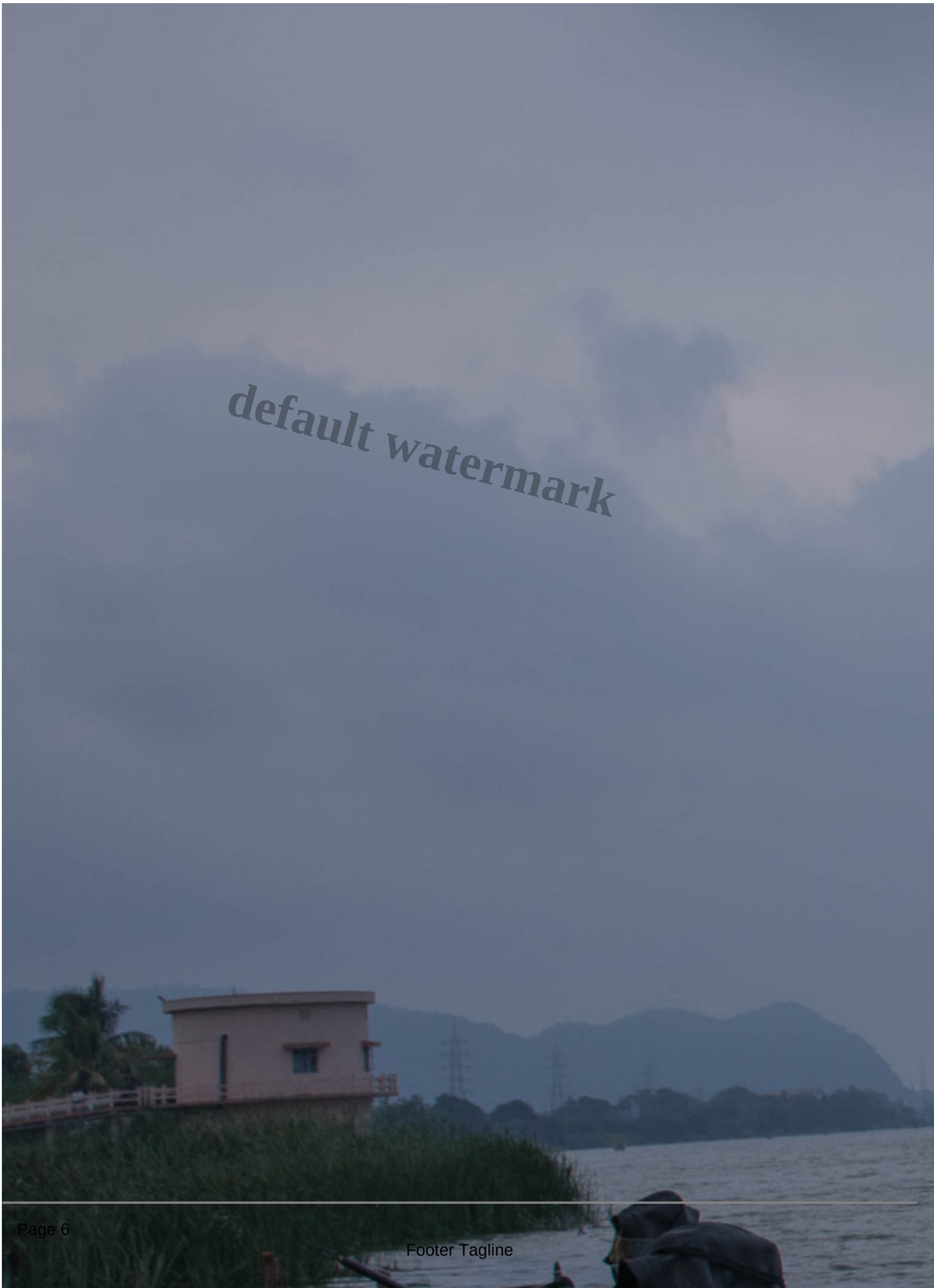
With a shaking bravado, I go about waiting with tired eyes for that beautiful moment of dawnâ??s early lights: the first pencil of the sun rays creeping across the sky. Eager to capture how it shows, glows on the boats anchored, heaving and affecting the surroundings like a dreamy artwork. I stood there impatient to want to stash the whole melody of illumining that would radiate the dark silence and seep the curtain of mist that I could vaguely note floating on the River far up to the horizon.

After some time, I could hear a mild activity at the rough parking lot, noises indicating people are walking in. Now I started breathing calmly and smoothly. The way they trudged in rough clothing, I assumed them to be the fishermen. I notice a couple, possibly wife and husband walking down to the makeshift wharf. I saw the man checking the engine of the boat, the wife, nets, and wares to haul out the water. A few minutes later, I hear the whirr of the engine from shadows, and the boat slides into a watery expanse of unveiling morning flicker.

Following that, my eyes spotted an older man, almost leaning with age, good enough to retire and relax at home. I observed parking his bicycle. His gait appeared much slower as he moved toward his boat that seemed smaller than the others moored alongside. In the boatâ??s belly, I saw him fixing, but in the darkness, it wasnâ??t clear much what he was working on. A few minutes later, his boatâ??s engine too sputtered to life and disappeared into the arms of silence and shadows.

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Itâ??s hard to imagine the daily struggle, the discipline they are tending, and their daily cycle of risks to earn their net-full of harvest. I witnessed in this working-class meeting and living the life going against the currents and the routine that deprives their bodies of a good nightâ??s sleep. I was amazed at the activity when a man got his boat ready, and his kid, I guess, also climbed into the boat who seemed hardly five, perhaps learning his fatherâ??s craft a tad too early!


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These pre-dawn portraits of hard work moving through the darkness have shocked me out of complacency. Never had I any opportunity, before, to attempt a peek at the demands of these daily tribulations.

Why? I have a reason to rationalize myself: itâ??s all about the cocoon of entitlement of life I live in, the comforts I relish, I must confess, the easygoing attitude deeply fixed inside me, to be honest, itâ??s the small-mindedness to engage in any charitable outlook.

I realised how little Iâ??m aware of the risky lives they lead. These fishermenâ??s world of hardworking showed up with an altogether different meaning. I saw them having become a part of the river, fused with its smells, bountifulness, and ferocity. Raising before dawn, their deep love for the river and fishing craft insecurely interlaced with adventure and unsafe life. I canâ??t help but imagine the uncertain options their families brave altogether.

Shamefully, I admit, such details of precarious lives which so far I never knew existed?

I stood there on the rain-beaten steps that led to the River, a little awkwardly; my expensive camera gear perched on the tripod not to miss the tones the foggy morning sky spraying on the boats, on the waters, and at the far horizons. Bringing together the boats and its inmates into the view-finder, peering at them, I felt awfully guilty. The irony was unmissable. I wonder for a moment centering at the pairs: father and son, brother and sister, wife and husband, a lonely aged man holding an oar, far away in turbulent waters braving for a livelihood with humility, their grace, and braveness reflecting on my high-priced lens as I click down the shutter button.

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My humane response to this episode has been something different, something revelatory. Itâ??s like asking me to reflect: how often do you see the raw realities of life and how stinging to infer the pain around. Going back home, all the intense images now digitally saved, I get a feeling Iâ??m carrying their anguish behind in my car. I felt empathic, more humble than I was before, but I know the fact remains, perhaps I canâ??t switch off what I have witnessed today for a long time.

Category

1. Uncategorized

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