



HAT SELLER

Description

While we were there, every minute colored and refreshed the days that passed on our school journey. A two-day reunion was planned, and our troop of fifteen wiser, but slower, grey souls gathered in Visakhapatnam. I believe it's too short a time to reminisce, to pore over, and celebrate fifty years of mischief that followed us, laughter that remained fresh, and our memories stubbornly alive and refusing to grow old.

Vizag is a popular tourist destination with a lively, humming coast. We can also hear the chants of the bustling temple bells throughout the city, where divinity mingles with the sea breeze.

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The sea and the temples: for a photo enthusiast, the combination is an inviting visual feast, and I run, squeezing in some time, camera dangling, to catch a plateful of images.

We visited a temple. While my soul mates went in for divine blessings, I roamed about the premises to cheer up my digital gear to catch a few slices of everyday life, a human story. I looked around if I could spot an unnoticed interaction between imagery and daily struggles.

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It was a late, moderate winter morning: fresh and warm. Amid the eager devotees and the honking of vehicles, I noticed a hat seller. Straw hats with multi-coloured brims, handmade fans, and other wares covered him completely. Some of them sat on his head like a long, inverted ice-cream cone. A stack of another cluster of stuff hid the length of one hand and circled his neck like a necklace. I puzzled over how skillfully he balanced the whole interesting merchandise. The free left hand helped him wave to call the temple-goers.

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No one was paying any attention to him in the crowd. Most of them, religiously dressed, hurry past him, hands folded and chanting. Yet I see him strolling gently, not in a rush, across the compound buzzing with frenzied devotees, other hawkers, and crammed parking. In the relentless sun beating down, he humbly asks for a bargain. I hear his firm, patient pleas â?? a battle for livelihood, like a prayer of his own. For me, it rang truer, divinely sincere, than the many disciples rich in get-up but poor in generosity.

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I kept watching him. He noticed my lens focused and tagging him from a safe distance. His skin darkened by years of laboured heat, his eyes looking for a buyer, his life routine, almost circular like the pilgrims who walk around the sanctum. Yet his portrait displayed a trace of optimism. Yes, he outdid himself in his labour of endurance. I imagined he couldn't let himself forget that his family had to be fed by the thin thread of his daily earnings.

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I find a harsh irony in his work. His daily grind seems monotonous and muted. But the hats he sells shine with bright colours as if to make a mockery of his dusty existence. He is selling the hats the shields that keep us in shade and comfort, and you find him standing on the hot floor in the sun's glare, selling his wares.

My lens sought and framed the seller from points that didn't intrude on his quiet pursuit. He maintained, during the hour I tailed him, a perseverance that was balanced, humble, and sincere.

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I paused for a while after packing my gear, and I heard my empathetic voice quoting likewise:

â??In this down-to-earth episode, in this simple bargain, I found a twin benefit; both buyer and seller live a better, more protected than before.â?•

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Category

1. Places

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Author

eswarnadipalli

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