â??ME, MYSELF AND PHOTOGRAPHYâ??

Description

The camera bag with bold letters â??NIKONâ?? inscribed on the top of it is buried away below stacks of old newspapers, unwanted trash and old magazines, left to gather dust for the past four years. On the visit to the US after my daughter Neelimaâ??s marriage, it was presented by my son-in-law, Krishna. Perhaps, my daughter had given him a hint about my liking for photography when they were considering what gift would be useful to me. Thus the basic model Nikon along with its shoulder bag reached my home and had become subject of my inattention for many reasons for more than four years.

I was introduced to photography when I was ten years old by my paternal uncle who was an artist and a photographer specialized in portraiture photography and oil painted portraits. He used to run a studio in early 70â??s with the name â??Moon Studioâ?• on the main road of a better-known suburb â?? Patamata, of our city Vijayawada â?? now the capital of newly formed Andhra Pradesh.

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The studio evokes my old memories, vaguely, when I look back: its handmade wooden interiors, including the handmade wooden tripod, used to mount the camera, and the huge incandescent bulbs which are manually operated to adjust the light, and hand painted sceneries pulled down as a backdrop for various occasions and demands. My uncle had the camera Yashiki â?? a TLR, medium format camera. The film rolls are special size called â??120â?? to give 12 square negatives images. It may sound odd now, but in those days, the film has to be loaded in complete darkness. The loading and â??developingâ?? of the film is totally done in â??darkroomsâ?? specially designated small rooms at the back side of the studio, where films are loaded, and photographic processing or development is carried out. Once the film is processed we get a â??negativeâ??. The negative is then placed in an â??enlargerâ?? and projected onto a sheet of a photographic paper. Agfa and Kodak are two brands that use to sell photographic paper in A4 sized boxes wrapped in silver- lined black paper. Photography in 70â??s was wholly, a manual, technical and creatively tedious process.

The empty thick straw boxes, the silver foil paper, the used film reels around small black plastic spools would add to my â??collectiblesâ?? when I used to go around the â??dark roomâ?? to gather them from time to time. How happy Iâ??m when Iâ??m a ten years young child innocently treasuring all theâ??done with trashâ?? and walking down the kutcha road leading to our ancestral home where I stayed until I completed my tenth standard before moving to our own house a few kilometers away. No television, no computers: radios havenâ??t made their presence yet, in any of the middle-class neighborhood comprising not more than six to seven houses on either side of the street. So we are left to our own innovative missions to be together, be engaged, and be merry. With the type of memories I have possessively bundled for the past forty five years, I guess they were as pleasurable as they were rewardingly worthy chronicles to be held close to my heart for so many years.

My classmates at Bapatla Agricultural college, when I joined in 1978, would confirmedly testify that I have prospered more with my camera work and picture taking than with scoring well in academics and sweating out in field work, laboratories, or career-related considerations. I have come to a quick

conclusion that, in educative aspects, Iâ??m a mediocre, unambitious, light-hearted chap: certainly not a hard working type as it was required in any professional college. During the blissful four years of hostel life, Iâ??m introduced to, fourâ??life -long, close at heartâ?? passions: the love of reading, the penchant for writing, interest in photography and delighting in western music. I never understood at that time the merits of my decision, but today, Iâ??m buoyantly willing to acknowledge that the tenure at Bapatla has put me on a path of lifelong learning and self-education.

During the second year at the campus, I entered waving a RICOH 35mm film camera a fully automatic and with built-in flash. I havenâ??t gained much in the skill of photography at the college, excepting taking snapshots of my roommates, few black and white images of our huge campus filled with abandoned rusted massive agricultural-related machinery. The main deterrent why I couldnâ??t experiment with photography was there are no good photo processing units in Bapatla and even getting the required photographic films were a problem then. After that, the photo market was filled with various color photographic films like Fuji, and Kodak. I became instantly an ardent fan of Kodak chrome 35mm films.

I shifted to Bangalore after completion of my degree in Bapatla: successfully passed out by a whisker, just like I had it in my previous board examinations. By then I have assessed myself thoroughly and concluded, strongly in my mind, with apologies to my father, a doctorate in Physics: that formal education is not applicable to a whimsical personality like mine. I love reading but not textbooks; I like writing but not formal exams. I very well know Iâ??m not cut to picking up degrees, but on my fatherâ??s insistence, I managed one more failed attempt to get a post-graduate degree at Bangalore. Instead, the Bangalore stay has rewarded me with a few more non-academic skills: My communication in English has improved abundantly, I also picked up a few inputs related to public speaking, which I never knew, has so much glamour surrounding it until I became an administrator and principal in my own right after my fatherâ??s sudden demise in 1990. Finding myself spending more time in the literature department of University library, and socializing with some of creative scholarsâ?? working day in and day out in research projects I entered the world of English classics and Ayn Rand.

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Coming to photography Iâ??m the happiest guy having to spend more than a year in Bangalore. The city has got everything that an aspiring amateur photo enthusiast could desire for: fantastic climate, the rich luscious nature, picture-perfect hills, and accommodating gang of friends. It is in Bangalore that I have met some of the best nature photographers; stepped into the best photo studios of India who not only counseled me in â??doâ??s and donâ??tsâ?? in photography but also recommended the best equipment I can use and the books I can choose to dig deeper into the craft.

Back at home in Vijayawada, my father, not so happy of my wayward attitude and being aware of my leanings over the unconventional field of photography, promptly pulled me out of Bangalore and not even asking for my consent, arranged my marriage with Mani â?? who was nineteen and I twenty-three. I heard a few whispers that my father was encouraging â??child marriageâ??. I vehemently tried to fight against the urgency and the alliance but didnâ??t have enough courage to defy my fatherâ??s diktat.

Mani, my wife, a classical dancer is a shutterbugâ??s delight. After our marriage, she needed not much time to understand my quirky habits â?? western pop music and photography. Perhaps, her youngish innocence has to do with her adjusting to my strange life-habits. The charm she used to convey, the magic in her eyes, the grace with which she managed herself has become my solo theme for next three years for my camera. Although she is no more today, my twenty-five-years collection of her pictures

along with my two children is a treasure â?? trove of her beautiful portraiture â?? the colorful motifs with which Iâ??m left to live the rest of my life.

In the thirty years of active quest, searching into myself, questioning, â??my loyalties to my profession as a teacher, administrator, as a trustful husband nursing when my wife was fatally hit by cancer, as a father guiding the married lives of my two children: â??had I been as truthful I assume as I appear; to be as compatible as many consider that Iâ??m made of;â?•. The answers would be, transparently to look at, I may get an â??a feeble thumbs upâ??. The reasons could be as confusing as my current state of mind â?? almost left alone to fend for myself.

Set about to deal with many tides and turbulence, in my forty year saga, I became very able to face them with remarkable preparedness that sometimes even surprises me: thanks to the scaffolding that I have built around me with my obsessive habits: reading books, listening to music, daily meditation, writing down my viewpoint. Lately, I have added photography too. Any severe rattling I feel that Iâ??m passing through I take refuge inside my scaffolding to stand strong and preserve my balance â?? physically, psychologically and emotionally. Colleges, indeed, havenâ??t rewarded me with earning keys but positively armed me with surviving expertise.

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Category

1. Uncategorized

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