

# Chapter 25

## Beads in the Necklace of Time

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The author remembers childhood days or pre photography days through the yellowing family photographs as much as from memories. From 1985 to 1990, these images were visual notes in the author's photographic diary. A meeting with a stranger in 1986 during a train journey to meet and show his early work to senior photojournalists and seek their advice on becoming a professional photographer laid the foundation for the most significant project of the author's life – UNSUNG. This essay is about the journey towards a semblance of self-realisation through photography over 35 years. The timeline, however, is non-linear. The author inquires about reinterpreting the self in autobiography and ponders over questions such as if the self is a constant? Though the sense of self may be ever forming and dissolving and documenting the other, is, in fact, an autobiography?*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Our lives, neighbourhoods, villages, and cities are like rivers of memories. Memories layered upon each other make life what it is. They add layers to life. Memories of love, loss, grief, happiness, sadness, and trauma or their effects may scaffold or cripple us. What would life be without memories? It is hard to imagine. In the time of analogue photography, prints were photographs; they lend permanency to our memories. Today they are digital files. They reside in servers, computers, and other digital devices and are as ephemeral as life. I wonder about the nature of memories 50 years from now. This chapter is about a photographer looking out, looking inward, and deciphering the present with the help of photographic experiences.

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## The Beginning

As a camera-shy boy growing up in the small town of Mangalore on the western coast of southern India, photography was not in my mind as a life journey. I grew up in a different India, where food shortages were the norm; one had to wait for five years to get a landline connection from the telecom department, the only telco, government owned. It was a world where one had to wait for three hours to connect to a phone 300Km away, and making an international call was almost impossible. Import duty on cameras and accessories was a staggering 250%. The only practitioners in my milieu were studio owners who came to photograph weddings with their twin-lens reflex cameras and large flashes. Occasionally we would step into their studio for family portraits. Then, of course, one always had the odd uncle or a cousin who had settled in the US, came calling occasionally and took pictures. When someone got married, they went to the studio for a portrait with their spouse. Man in a suit, perhaps a borrowed from the studio, as people in Southern India rarely owned or wore a suit - Perhaps everyone who went to the studio for a post-wedding portrait wore that suit jacket and the lady in a saree. Few copies used to be printed, one for themselves and a few others for close family.

*Figure 1. My family photograph was made sometime in the early 1970s in the best photo studio in Mangalore, Studio Balco. My father passed away in December 1999. (© 2022, the author)*



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