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LINE OF LIGHT

C. RAJAGOPAL

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THE COMMAND TO LOOK



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An autobiographical note

C. Rajagopal

All forms of photography, except the purely utilitarian, are some form of art. Art, in turn, is not merely factual communication, but essential communication as well. The latter transcends limitations of time, place, incident and even subject matter. This kind of photographic art is called pictorialism. And since it represents the photographer's communion with himself, the magic involved in its creation cannot be taught; though the technicalities can.

I have often been asked what makes a photograph of a landscape special...how do you transcend the mere documentation of topography and achieve art? How does recording what is there for all to see become a vision that lives on and on?

The ingredient that makes the unforgettable difference between an ordinary and an extraordinary photograph is creative vision that is based on reality. This visionary creativity, if recognized and felt easily—like a fragrance, taste, sound, or feeling—needs no explanation or analysis. After all, a picture can be logically perfect and yet be a miserable failure. It may miss out on some elements and still have a soul and sing forth. The magic owes its presence to the photographer's eye, mind and imagination. Henri Cartier Bresson believed in the *decisive moment*: in a world always in visual flux, everything sometimes suddenly falls into a composition that is visually meaningful. This is the *decisive moment*. One of a photographer's greatest challenges is to recognize, capture and freeze it.

The photographs you will see in the following pages are the realizations of creative vision. They represent my journeys of photographic discovery and vision over the last few decades. I hope they touch your emotions as well as your aesthetic senses.

These photographs would not have been possible without the background in which I grew up, and in which my love and understanding of photography was nurtured and developed. Before we move on to my photographs, I'd like to share a little of this history with you.

Some unforgettable influences

The art of photography was an abiding interest in my family, dating back to the days of my great-grandfather, Dewan Rangacharya (1831-1883). He held office as *Chancellor* of the Mysore Palace, and acted as a *deo parente* to the Maharaja-in-waiting, Chamaraja Wodeyar X. His duties included the supervision of the prince's education and he thought it both necessary and desirable to teach the young prince the recently arrived art of photography. The royal family was extensively photographed by

Dewan C. V. Rangacharya, c. 1870
(Photograph taken by Chamaraja Wodeyar)



R. H. Chamaraja Wodeyar X, c. 1880

professional photographers, mostly Englishmen. (Interestingly, the "official portrait" of Rangacharya that is displayed in most government offices today, was taken by His Highness himself!) As was the fashion of the day amongst certain strata of society, Rangacharya's family was also extensively photographed. It serves as a valuable historical document and is presently in my possession. These it, however, to record of Rangacharya himself having done any photography.

C. Rajagopalacharya, Rangacharya's son-in-law, was a Superintendent of the Survey Department. Exposed in his work to photography, he embraced the art with a passion. He set up a darkroom in the family mansion *Satrayasini* (later *Srisudar House*). The sunlight was a red glass set in the wall through which the daylight filtered. There are many photography-related stories told to me by the older generation. One concerns the albumen paper used for printing. This had to be made from fresh eggs, but being orthodox Brahmins, no one in the family could touch an egg. A non-Brahmin had to be employed for this purpose. Rajagopalacharya acquired and used a half-plate triple extension Perkin, Cox, and Kaymont midget and box wood camera with a 6.5 Goetz Daggs double anastigmat lens. This historic piece is still with me.

Rajagopalacharya's son, Chakravartty, used to say that his photographs of Belur and Halebidu were published in *The Times of India* in the early 1900s. My uncles were also enthusiastic photographers. Rangaswamy was in Mysore during the First World War and recorded whenever he could of his experiences on film. Padmanabhan used a Rolleiflex and was responsible for launching me into photography. Krishnaswamy indulged in all photographic processes, particularly colour. Laxmiree, Anandachari, Fusley Colson, Carboon and Carboon. He handled every possible camera. Varadahan, an industrial chemist, used a Zeiss Ikon to record family history.



Youngest with his mother, 1928

My early forays into photography

I was born on 15th October, 1928. The picture alongside was taken a mere hour. At the age of 10, I was gifted a Contax 888 camera, which cost all of Rs 2-12 seven. This included the cost of a roll of film, developing and printing! After shooting a couple of rolls, I discovered the camera. Unfortunately, I was unable to put it together again. Sometime later, I acquired a second-hand *Vagelander Brillant* for Rs 8. It was a bargain except for the sad fact that the front lens element was missing. These experiences took the lustre out of photography and I turned in disgust to *toy modelling*.

But the break from photography was very short. In early 1942, I wanted to send photographic prints of my model planes to *Aeromodeller magazine*. To do so I needed a camera. And thus began my search for a *Box Camera* ("You press the button. We do the rest," as the Kodak slogan goes). However, in post-war times, this was easier said than done. My problem was solved when my uncle Padmanabhan gifted me a war disposal Kodak *Bantam* 828 camera with a 4.5 anastigmat lens—my first real camera. Being new sophisticated than anything I had handled so far, it made me learn the technicalities of photography.

The Mysore Photographic Society opens my eyes

In mid-1947, I visited the *first All India Salon of Photography*. Till this moment, I was quite snug and self-satisfied with my *toy modelling*. But exposure to the work of the great masters of the day shocked me out of my complacency and dithered all my illusions of my own worth! I bought a salon catalogue and discovered that the show was by the Mysore Photographic Society. The contact address given in the catalogue was of Dr G. Thomas. I lost no time in dropping him a postcard and was warmly invited to attend a meeting of the Society at the YMCA. The meeting comprised a demonstration-cum-lecture on the



A few words on the photographs...



Page 1

"The Thunderstorm Approaches" (1948)

The first picture began the historical exhibition highlighted by the foreign press. It stands against newspaper, which carried a headline about a terrible date. The story recalls the image of the newly married couple.

The scene starts on an isolated beach. The couple stands on a small dune, which was a few meters away from the sign, and when the picture was taken in 1947, it was 1948.

The further exhibition was full by the National Exhibition, Nuremberg, Nuremberg, in the 1930s.



Page 2 "The Bridge" (1972)

The picture is a the history of the light. The bridge in Transylvania, Romania, was seen one day, when walking to a car on the highway in Galati. There, there was a line of people, not only a car, but a line of people. I stepped down to the bridge, slipped over the edge, and saw the lights of the cars. When the car, it started the newly opened bridge. Much later, when I had to go to Transylvania again, I walked the same bridge from the same spot at 2:30 of the afternoon. I saw the photograph to remember what people thought about the first time I saw it.



Page 3

"The Sun Goes Down" (1966)

This is the first time of the history of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun.

The first picture began the historical exhibition highlighted by the foreign press. It stands against newspaper, which carried a headline about a terrible date. The story recalls the image of the newly married couple.

The scene starts on an isolated beach. The couple stands on a small dune, which was a few meters away from the sign, and when the picture was taken in 1947, it was 1948.



Page 4

"A Touch of Sunrise" (1962)

I was a very old man, accompanied by a good friend. I was looking at the first picture of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun.

This is the first time of the history of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun. It was in the early 1960s, and was the first time of the sun.



Page 5

"Street Night" (1981)

This is a black and white photograph of a street at night. It was in the early 1980s, and was the first time of the sun. It was in the early 1980s, and was the first time of the sun.



Page 6

"A Touch of Sunrise" (1962)

This is a black and white photograph of a street at night. It was in the early 1980s, and was the first time of the sun. It was in the early 1980s, and was the first time of the sun.

The scene starts on an isolated beach. The couple stands on a small dune, which was a few meters away from the sign, and when the picture was taken in 1947, it was 1948.

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