

The moment's gone

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Take photos as if you have only 36 frames

Turn on the front camera and shoot yourself, shoot once, shoot again. Each frame catches you in the same expression, but shoot 10 anyway. But when you reverse the camera and look outside sometimes, you realise that the world caught in a rectangle can be quite beautiful. Much more fascinating than lopsided self-portraits taken with a wide lens that almost always distort your face. No angle can really fix it; it's not your face; it's the lens.

I often take self-conscious selfies and they don't say much about me. I doubt they will intrigue anyone, not even me. Delete. Click. Delete.

Photography was a precious commodity once, each square of emulsion waiting to capture an image. You had 36 moments to record life and you took care to get it right. If you got two extra frames in the roll, it was your lucky day. Now you can shoot 360, but you're still not satisfied. Holidays, birthdays, special occasions, they are recorded, in multiple takes. Video killed the radio star and the phone camera killed the decisive moment.

Here's a fact. Your baby photos tucked in albums, a little yellow, a little frayed, are going to be far superior than any pictures you have taken of your own children on the phone. The old photos, carefully taken by the aesthetic uncle or loving grandfather on trips to forts and beaches will stand the test of time. Now we call a photographer and pay him pots of money to place your child in bizarre costumes in artificial environments. Today, the baby's inside a sunflower and there you were in the glare of the sun in your mother's arms.

When you click, remember this image is going to outlive you. And outlive the person being photographed, perhaps even the landscape and the monument. So shoot with care and love and some attention to detail. This is going to be a keepsake. Handle with care.

We capture everything relentlessly: food on the table, road accidents, the drunk passed out on the road. Kisses boomerang. Dead bodies trend. Will photo streams be the footprints we leave? Tell future generations who we really are? That selfie with the corpse wrapped in white is a chilling footprint to leave.

The selfie-with-celebrity has long replaced the thrill of a personalised autograph. Photo albums disappeared from homes along with diaries, paperbacks and CDs. We are flooded with images. But how many will we keep?

I'm the professional gawker, to quote Zadie Smith. I can stare at humanity all day. The gawker in me was kidnapped by my phone. I drowned in Instagram and videos. But I'm swimming up again; I've started looking around, my eyes readjusting to the real world. *Vedikkai paaru* (look around!) I used to tell my daughter whenever we drove. Now I remind myself to do that.

And I urge you to do the same. Look outside. Search. Then take photos. As if there were only 36 frames in your phone.

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