

A night by the Ghats

"The next train Delhi Varanasi intercity express will be arriving shortly on platform No. 6. " the announcement echoed through the busy walkway as the crowd hastily rises up brisking down the chaotic halt as the last train of the night is approaching. Not a modest journey to be I suppose! as I jolted my grey suitcase through the unruly hustle making my way towards the berth. We've been a developing nation for quite a while yet the Indian railways still remains a remarkable sight to witness, for notable reasons of course if you are a passenger boarding on a general pass, the Britishers have long gone it seems leaving behind the machineries of what the government seems to be operating for centuries now indeed! Ha! It's been a while since the quirks have made me giggle Alas! the corporate drains more souls than it feeds. The skies are clear and the unduly smog canopying the streets of Delhi at night seems to haven't traveled this far. The bustling noises came to an halt as the flooding mass settled down on the passenger's seat. The engine rattled forward with the characteristic horn, the holy city of Ganga awaits as the destination. Nearly a decade it has been since the last visit, time sure flies by as the birds of the sky flit past. I remember the class of my childhood days when all would eagerly pack for the vacations, and then on first glance of dawn we would aboard the early train to my grandmother's house which is not a sight afar from the swift plains of the Ganga ghat. The lady has bestowed her entire life to this holy city. They say the death dances in the adorning pyres of the Manikarnika, thousands of those who crosses to the other side while thousand on queue for their call. Each plight of stairs cornering down the street enclosing within itself a narrow passageway of gulleys and columns of labyrinth painted in the local art of the city, each steeped wall with open windows of sub caste women with pots in their arms or widows in ashrams holding the beads of their holy chants, all the roads end up in the holy river it seems. That's how it has always been. The ghats behold the etiquette of the city with numerous tales of life it buries, as though it captures the explorer's soul in a mortifying manner as to trap within itself for eternity. As a child I fancied the bed time granny tales often dating back to the 60s and 70s contemporary India, how the scrawny old man who haunts the peepal trees by the mounted lane or the Aghori who bewitch the spirits and subdues them in his spells. The ever compelling tales may seem to never end. The carriage engine squeaked into a steady bleak motion as the distant fog hoods the platform mnemonic. The skies are clouded and the sun has gone past the horizon by the while. I precariously ailed through the half empty staircase with a sigh of relief. The city is still as lively with the similar posthumous uni scraper residential motifs with a single lane alleyway that cuts through the ghats into multiple gullies. If my memory doesn't fail me one of such steeped old houses used to be my grandmother's though must be in a fragile dilapidated condition by now. It was half past eleven already I had to find a guest room or lounge to rest my head in for the night. I helped myself fast with a cup of classic lemon tea and headed towards the marketway. Luckily enough I was escorted by one of the lounge owners on the way with the help of a few street vendors. I went back to the ghats to witness the last prayer of the night, (the ratri aarti) the huge lit lamps surrounded the holy waters and the flakes of ashes from the pyres engulfed the sky as dimmed light bugs. The ghats were oddly brazen with a handful of people at sight. I leaned forward moving closer to down the burning pyres in order to catch a closer glimpse of the view. The night has dawned and the handful of peeps are now distant as well except for the one old lady who has taken a seat near the dimly lit pyre looking into the river. The lady seemed to be in her 80s draped in a faded cotton woven saree with steel reamed spectacles that appeared to be unmended and rusted. Her

body has wrinkled up with her hair unkempt, parted in the middle . Her face lit up in the flames had a dull complexion devoid of any expressions. “It's such an odd hour for an old lady to stay here”! However, I could care less,