

## Short Story: The Last Sunset at Kashi

Balu

Let me begin this story, perhaps for the last time, in Kashi—the holiest city along the banks of the Ganges. Also known as Benares or Varanasi, it's a place I've always wanted to visit before everything comes to an end. Many journey to this city in search of peace, while others come to embrace their final moments, believing that dying in Kashi frees one from the endless cycle of birth and death. Here, one is said to attain Mukti, Moksha, or Nirvana—a liberation of the mind from the prisons of confusion, false hopes, jealousy, sadness, happiness, anger, love, lust, and perhaps other unnamed emotions.

A few friends of mine stayed in Kashi for a time, and they often shared stories of its crowded streets, brimming with people from all walks of life. Seekers converge there, searching for peace, answers, and, most of all, hoping for a final glimpse of their beloved god, Shiva.

If you've read my stories, you'll recognize Shiva, known as the "God of the North" or "the one with the third eye," who dwells on Mount Kailasa in the Himalayas. As one of the divine trinity—Brahma, the creator; Vishnu, the preserver; and Shiva, the destroyer—he is also a "Chandala," meaning one who burns corpses in the cremation grounds.

For many reasons, I feel a deep connection to this mythological figure—perhaps because his solitude after losing his beloved first wife, Sati, resonates with my own. His loneliness finally ended when he met Gauri; they later married, had children, and lived happily on Mount Kailasa. Kashi, however, remained his favorite city. Shiva would visit it often with

his family, meeting people and savoring the beauty of the sunset over the horizon.

This story begins on the very banks of the Ganges, where our central character watches the setting sun, perhaps for the last time. Let's call him Balu—a name I favor, both for its meaning, "young boy," and as my own pen name. Balu gazes at the sun without blinking, pain and confusion etched on his face, as if life has dealt him an unkind hand. Tears stream down his cheeks; he has come here seeking liberation. Balu is a young, gifted musician, with a mentor who sees immense potential in him. Fame has already brushed him at a young age, and people are beginning to recognize his talent.

Balu is a simple soul, not one to worry much about the future. He believes that his passion for music will eventually lead him to excellence and secure his daily bread. He faces whatever life brings—good or bad—with acceptance, tackling each problem with a positive spirit. To him, life without challenges would be dull; there should always be some adventure along the way. So, why is Balu in so much pain?

Beside him, a chandala was preparing a corpse for burning with wood, all the while quietly observing Balu. The chandala looked at Balu and asked, "Are you in pain?"

Balu ignored him, lost in his thoughts. Undeterred, the chandala continued, "Sometimes, talking to someone can bring relief. I've seen many like you here on the banks of the Ganges—some even found peace."

Balu turned to him and sighed, "Yes, I'm in deep pain and confusion. I feel helpless, unsure if I can continue on my chosen path of music."

"Is it longing for someone that's causing all this pain and confusion?" asked the chandala.

Balu didn't answer, but his silence spoke volumes.

The chandala said to Balu, "This riverbank has witnessed countless stories and confusions over the ages."

Balu began his story, "Like everyone else, I too have been caught by that fifth fundamental force of nature—'attraction to another person.' I don't fully understand this mysterious pull, which now leaves me in pain and confusion. Yes, I am in love—with a girl I hardly know."

He continued, "I first met her here in Kashi, where I came to study music under my mentor. She was here too, learning classical dance from my teacher's wife. She'd come from a far-off place to pursue her art, and for nearly a year, I watched her in silence as she danced, unable to muster the courage to speak with her, not even to ask where she was from. Whether it was my own shyness or a fear buried deep within, I held back, keeping my distance."

"It wasn't love at first sight, no. Instead, it was a slow, quiet unfolding, something that took root without my even realizing. One day, it just struck me that she'd become part of my thoughts."

Balu continued, "I feel drawn to her, but I don't know what's causing it. I barely know her, so what is it in her that pulls me in? I'm confused. I thought about going up to talk to her, to get to know her better, but I couldn't. I was afraid—what if she got upset with me? What if she rejected me? What if my presence made her uncomfortable? I don't know what to do. I'm just... confused."

"Now I hear from my mentor that she's getting married to her dance partner this Sunday. I'm trying to tell myself to let her go, to forget her—but I'm not a machine; I can't just erase her from my heart in a moment. How do I forget the memories I have of her? The way she moved, the

quiet moments I watched her dance, the glances I thought she didn't notice? Each memory clings to me, and no matter how hard I try, I can't just turn it off."

Tears streamed down his face. The chandala looked at him and said, "Even the gods aren't spared from pain. Shiva himself mourned for ages after losing his beloved Sati. Time, and the solitude of Kailasa, eventually helped him find peace.

But Jumping into the Ganges to end your sorrow was never the solution. Time could have healed your pain, and eventually, you could have found someone else. As everyone says, life moves on, and happiness comes in unexpected ways.

The sun is nearly setting on the horizon, and the view is beautiful today—though it's not always like this. Can I ignite your mortal body, before the sun fully sets? I wish your immortal soul a brighter life in your next journey.

Balu said, 'Let me witness the sun's final kiss upon the Ganges one last time.

The

End.