



The Last Song of Dusk

Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

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“Set in 1920s India, this magical debut novel tells the story of beautiful Anuradha, whose songs are spellbinding, but whose fate is troubled.”

–Elle

When the astonishingly lovely Anuradha moves to Bombay to marry Vardhmaan, a charming young doctor, their life together has all the makings of a fairy tale. But when their firstborn son dies in a terrible accident, tragedy transforms their marriage into a bleak landscape. As the pair starts fresh in a heartbroken old villa by the sea, they are joined by Nandini, a dazzling and devious artist with a trace of leopard blood in her veins. While Nandini flamboyantly takes on Bombay’s art scene, the couple attempts to mend their marriage, eventually discovering that real love, mercurial and many-hued, is given and received in silence. Sensuous and electric, achingly moving and wickedly funny, *The Last Song of Dusk* is a tale of fate that will haunt your heart like an old and beloved song.

“A cornucopia of life at full tilt and high color . . . Shanghvi—who’s been compared to Arundhati Roy, Zadie Smith, and Vikram Seth—combines ribald humor with prose poetry.”

–Sunday Oregonian

“Few first novelists achieve such perfection, such control, in their performance.”

–India Today

“A gorgeous novel . . . written with a youthful twinkling eye.”

–Los Angeles Times Book Review

“Lush, witty . . . sassy prose . . . moves like a carnival ride.”

–San Francisco Chronicle

The Last Song of Dusk Details

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Author : Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi

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From Reader Review The Last Song of Dusk for online ebook

Jayci says

Warning!!!! This book may not be for everybody. I loved it. Newsweek calls it "an erotic tale of love and loss, loaded with magical realism" I couldn't have said it better. It is very sensual, not to be confused with sexual. So romantic, tragic, lovely.

Vikalp Trivedi says

This debut novel of Siddarth Dhanvant Sanghvi starts as a fairy tale story between two wonderful characters - Vardhamaan and Anuradha . The novel proceeds very swiftly and really like a fairy tale romance . Until , the life happens. Story takes a twist and never becomes back again what it used to be . The story takes another twist when the Dariya Mahal and new characters are introduced . All characters were wonderfully build up and had their unique presence and impact on the story. The prose , language and writing were rich , lucid and and was almost in poems . The another wonderful things were the situation building , description of events and humor going throughout the book .

A very big change in the story occurs when the character of Nandini Hariharan was introduced and later become a pivotal part of the story . But I think the problem with the story started here . The character of Nandini was drawn very strongly that it dominates the entire story and gradually takes over the entire story . The Vardhamaan-Anuradha story becomes like a sub-plot , and while building the Nandini angle , the Vardhamaan-Anuradha angle starts crumbling towards the end, and hence the story starts losing the balance . The character of Vardhamaan almost disappears towards the end.

Despite these shortcomings the author successfully given closure to each and every character and also a very poetic end to the story.

A Very Compelling Read .
4 Stars .

Nandaja says

I am not sure how I actually liked this book. All I can say is after certain portions, I couldn't keep the book down maybe because the burden was just too unbearable. 'In this life, my love, expect no mercy', this kept ringing in my head and I started relating it to my own life.

Extremely well written. I did adore every single line and passage in the book. But still I don't know how to rate this one, whether I liked it or not. So leaving it unrated.

Hardly says

This book is odd to me, because it's lushly written-- I can smell the frangipani that Anuradha braids into her

hair, hear the peacocks screeching, taste the dust that rises as the rickshaws trundle down the street-- but at the same time the lushness convolutes and confuses. The author, Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi, has a true talent for description, but sometimes he loses control of himself and indulges in prose that becomes positively violet (especially in the sex scenes with all the phallic worship):

"...the restless, hungry baton in his trousers..."

"...the adamant sumptuousness of his manhood: a proud, thick, succulent thing had found its home..."

"...a member between his legs that was lonely and strong willed and utterly gorgeous inside its own confusion..."

What in the world does that last one even mean? The "c0ck yay!" enthusiasm gets a bit old after a while, and the attitude toward it becomes, "Yes, yes, we know c0ck is king. Can we get back to the story now?"

...on the other hand, we have little witticisms that amuse me enough to redeem the above indiscretions about 20%, such as the following:

"Are you a star?" he asked.

"No," she replied, "I'm an entire constellation."

The pacing is languid, as befits a story set in turn-of-the-century India. It unravels at its own pace, with flashbacks that are handled with subtlety and without feeling intrusive or clumsy. Shanghvi doesn't rush through anything, is in no hurry to chivvy the plot along, but somehow it's all so interesting we don't care and are content to go along with him, trusting him to get us where we need to go.

I'm not crazy about the foreshadowing, however, which occurs with all the finesse of a mallet to the skull. And the dialogue is too contemporary far too often-- doesn't sound in the least like something people in post-colonial India would say in the 1920's. There's a clear feminist theme, here, as well as pro-gay overtones, both of which feel forced, like there's an agenda behind them. I've always felt that if you're going for social commentary in your fiction, it shouldn't hit you like an arrow through the neck.

It's irritating when the vicious old hag of the story (you knew there was going to be one, right?) has entire conversations with her equally malicious parrot, and the anthropomorphization of the house in which they live seems a bit batty. There's a weird quasi-magical subtheme that's more puzzling than intriguing-- a red herring that adds questionable merit to the overall story and is never explained or justified-- and we're supposed to accept it without questioning.

Well, to hell with that. I question, baby, and I want answers: why do the women of Anuradha's family have the ability to work magic with their songs? Is Mohan a prodigy or some sort of divine creature? Is the house really alive and cranky? How is Nandini able to walk on water? Can it be possible for her to be the descendant of a human/leopard union?

The characterization is over-the-top, much of the time: there are three main characters, and they're all bewitchingly attractive, and their faults are never true faults (i.e. things that risk making the reader dislike them). They are, instead, faults that are supposed to make us like the characters all the more: Vardhmaan can't get over the grief of losing his son, but wouldn't we think him a less-than-devoted sire if he sprang back so quickly and easily? Nandini's wild, fey ways are meant to fascinate more than repel (such as when she

tells Gandhi his loincloth is hopelessly sexy-- we're supposed to be delighted by that rampant iconoclasy, and it shows).

And the nasty crone, Devi-bai, is a caricature of the evil stepmother... until they move out of the house, and then her wicked influence over their lives abruptly ends. What sort of antagonist is that? No bad guy worth their salt would just let themselves be written out of the book halfway through and let a possessed house take over the role. Unless she's not the antagonist of the story, in which case it should be made clearer because it's confusing.

The book does succeed in submerging the reader into the world of 1920's India, and the characters and plot are compelling enough to keep one reading instead of putting it aside, but overly lurid phrasing, anachronisms of speech, and whacked-out mystic occurrences jolt one's suspension of disbelief and call attention to the ultimate weakness of the prose.

As a first novel, *The Last Song of Dusk* is excellent, achieving a dreamlike surreality that other, more experienced writers strive (and fail) to accomplish, but in comparison to other authors (masters) of this genre (Isabel Allende, Arundhati Roy) it's clear where he's being imitative, rather than intuitive.

Dre says

If you read this book, don't judge. And you will know what I mean if you do decide to read this. It was recommended to me by one of the employees at my usual airport bookstore.

I really did enjoy the read. It is a sad and eloquent story about love, loss, and relationships - however bizarre they might be. Though I didn't always agree with what the characters decided, I did sympathize with them.

And of course how could I forget the most important part of reading this book -I learned more about India and being Indian so I can strive to be like Nipa Saraiya and Kate Patel.

Lori says

I would give this novel a higher rating for the quality of writing alone- the prose is lush and seductive, it has qualities of magical realism, and more than a touch of funny- but writing alone does not make a great story.

The story has to be there and I felt he got off to a good start, a young couple with an arranged marriage who fall in love and lose their son. How is this not enough? But, for him it isn't because he allows a cousin of the protagonist to enter the story, steal the novel, and forgets about its two main characters until the very end where they are dismissive thoughts of their son. Nandini is a character worthy of her own novel. If... he wouldn't have diminished her wild, savageness by adding the backstory that she got that way by being sexually abused. I detest this in literature. It's a cop out. Let her be a seductively despicable character in her own right without there having to be some reason behind it. Why can't a woman in literature be wicked and wasteful, the one you want to quite like but can't even when you can empathize with the vacancy inside of her?

Overall, the writing was gorgeous. Absolutely spectacular. However, I could never get over the fact that

reading it felt like watching a Woody Allen movie and reading Fitzgerald and Henry James at the same time.

Karen says

To be honest I am not really sure how I feel about this book. I've read several books set in India, and this one was different. The writing was beautiful, at times too beautiful. I would recommend *A Fine Balance*, or *Sister of My Heart* before this one.

Kkraemer says

A beautiful girl leaves her parents' home to meet her future husband, taking her songs and those of her ancestors to guide her life. What ensues is love...love of family, love of self, love of those who are curiously besotted, love of panthers and flowers and the moonlight on loins/ponds/the balcony.

It's also the book of distance, unbearable loneliness, and death.

This story isn't quite real, but it is utterly compelling. The story is something between a parable and a fantasy, with inexplicable powers and invisible forces. It's a story that grips the reader closely, making you watch the characters and the forest and the moonlight and the monsoon, an experience as close to "real" as anything I've read, an experience paralleled, possibly, by watching a 3-D Imax theater with all of the sensory effects of a steamy Indian life.

The experience of reading this book is similar to reading Garcia-Marquez for the first time, and, when characters do things that are uncomfortable and inappropriate, I watched from inches away and, at the same time, somehow "owned" the actions and words as if they were my own.

While the ending is less powerful than the rest of the book (a shift from experience to explanation), this is one of the most sumptuous, passionate books I've ever read. Not to be missed.

Jacq Jardin says

beautifully written. erotic. sad. compelling. colorful.

a story about an Indian family, the people around them, and the many different ways they deal with love, loss, betrayal, abuse, and grief. packed with colorful characters that are both charming and annoying at the same time, it is a tale certainly worth reading. a nice blend of magical realism and history. and the pace kept me forever on the edge of my seat (or bed, should i say). i finished reading it overnight. it isn't light on the emotions but it sure is refreshing.

a few highlighted lines:

"'It's bigger than us,' Anuradha accepted. 'So we confuse ourselves over it. And of course, its vastness

overwhelms. . But then that is the only lesson in life. How to love. How to love well, with a detached eye but a concerned hand. How to understand and surrender to its countless contradictions. Most importantly, though, how to never stop loving."

"When you think about it, it's crazy, all the things we carry inside us - and these are precisely the things we're just bursting to tell. How do we go through life like this, huh?"

Nisrin Aziz says

Finally, a book that makes me pause, lean back and disappear into thought. Every sentence is poetry.

Rachel says

Read like a poem - the story was out of this world; the writing was a dream to read and the author was only 26 when he wrote this his debut novel. Impressive on all counts and the perfect take-along book to my yoga retreat in Guatemala.

Faith says

Heartbreaking at times with descriptions so vivid you could picture yourself in India with them. I agree with the Sunday Times a magical piece of storytelling. The sex scenes were a bit comical though. I would definitely read another book by this author.

Lilli says

Easily one of the best books I've ever read, the author combines history and fantasy so seamlessly. Reading this book was like falling in love. When I was done I wanted to hug and kiss my children, call my friends and family to tell them how much I loved them, and have a good romp with my dog, however as it was something like 3am when I finished I opted to go to sleep instead, lest I be thought of as a lunatic.....or more of a lunatic.

Rhea Roy says

There is a wicked step mother, a haunted house, a parrot that mouths obscenities, a young girl who comes from a lineage of women who have supposedly copulated with leopards in the past, a handsome prince and a beautiful princess. Despite the surreal characters and story, *The Last Song of the Dusk* doesn't border on bizarre or seem fairy tale like-ish. The magical abilities of the characters is something that that author probably doesn't want his readers to take just too literally. They merely provide the background score, adding to the nuances that the characters display. Nandini's walking on water, Anuradha's songs and Vardhmaan's captivating story telling- these are all traits that make you imagine the characters in some ways. For eg. after the death of his son, Vardhmaan recedes into silence, the loss of a son running in parallel to the loss of his

storytelling abilities.

Much had been written about Sanghvi's use of vocabulary. Many might think its too boisterous. Many think that in the process to underline his grasp over the language, he has used flashy words which could have been expressed in a simpler way. In certain places I too fell the same, but over all I think Sanghvi manages to tie in the words well to create a style of prose that is highly subject to individual perceptions.

For a contemporary Indian author and his first book, *The Last Song of Dusk* is worth a read.

Ronak Gajjar says

I am speechless!

Him inscribing this is painfully magnificent, *"Love is bigger than us. So we confuse ourselves over it. And of course, its vastness overwhelms. But then that is the only lesson in life. How to love. How to love well, with a detached eye but a concerned hand. How to understand and surrender to its countless contradictions. Most importantly, though, how to never stop loving."*

How easily he defines love in such simple words, no complications.

He amazingly no rather I say magically will bound your soul phrase by phrase.

Vardhamaan and Anuradha Gandharva bound by seven sacred circles make one look India in the 1920s through different eyes.

Nandini never ceases to surprise at any moments.

Absolute elegant piece intertwining each aspect - social, romantic, political, intricately.

Pallavi Kamat says

I cannot believe how bad this book is. The story seemed promising but the descriptions and the way the story moves was awful. I am not sure if it's supposed to be a sarcastic book but the way it drops names & talks about the Page 3 people is cringe worthy.

I just felt the author was trying too hard to be cool. Or maybe I didn't get the book at all; maybe there's some deeper meaning beneath all the jazz.

Lilly says

Lucky me, I got an advance copy of this book. I read it in maybe 3 days following (and only that long because I had to work!) I had rolled my eyes when I read the comparisons reviewers had made to Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy. But he nails it- making the writing of *THE LAST SONG OF DUSK* arguably more accessible than the works of either.

I am getting ready to reread this one (I NEVER reread. That's how much I liked it), so re-review to come!

Shinde says

Lyrical writing. Sensual, rich, turgid with love and longing.

Uttara Srinivasan says

I never understood what the magic realism genre was all about - this one enhanced my education over night. For a debut novel - prose is lush and downright beautiful in places. But several portions left me less than comfortable with images and words - it adds to the melancholy of the story no doubt but it also makes me never want to think about the read again - that I my world is never a good sign

Neha says

A book that stands close to being a classic.. reading it is like listening to a melody on your vintage gramophone slowly dissolving in your thoughts and still lost as the record ends and the silence becomes a song too. It is one of those books you should never read again, because you would never feel what you felt the first time.

A masterpiece from an author who comes across sensitive and close to the feelings of his characters. He convinces you that Life is nothing but a series of tragedies, some seek the light after the long night and some seem to be lost in the darkness of the night that the night itself becomes the day. The characters of the story are deeply pained, tending and nurturing their sadness in their hearts through their songs, stories and paintings. They give their sadness a shape, a size, a colour that it comes alive and lives with them. The sadness is so overpowering and runs across the story with such strong undercurrents that you seem to relate to the characters only through their type of sadness – the sorrow in their songs, the pain of losing a loved one, the sadness of losing your dreams, the guilt of not being there, the lonely childhood, the farness from home, the words never said and the deeds never done, the longing for your loved one.

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<http://storywala.blogspot.in/2011/06/...>
