

“ME, SARBAJAYA”

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Apu, this is the letter I never wrote to you
carrying a world of huff inside me
your restless syllables a lump in my throat.
If you hold it close enough you can smell
the water –hyacinths
that bloomed purple in the grey pond
the mud road, the slant of our doorway,
hear the banana leaves sliced by the wind
the rail crush our dreams. Do you remember
the pond beside the house we stayed last
the one you ran to dip in every time you came home
on holidays, circles breaking
around you like my protective love?
I still walk beside the footprints
of its dense memories, my life
reflecting on its old waters.
Nature and me embroidered your home hand in hand
in unequal stanzas, stitching
dreams with your father’s words
broken verbs and adjectives on the monsoon
clothline. Then Durga
left me forever and your father’s thoughtless footsteps
followed. I gathered my straws
and stitched your nest in Mansapota.
You went to school, earned coins,
serving the gods. I felt
we were finally settled. Then, your results were good
you bagged a scholarship or something.
It took you to college, to Kolkata
away from me. I did want you
to study further, secretly nurturing
pride in your achievement like a red
hibiscus. I squeezed my heart
to let you go. Since then

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I lived only on weekends when you came home
waiting in silence with the entire ecosystem
the movements of earthworms and water- snakes
in my blood. Then, your shadow began to move away
from my courtyard and I spread out
my eyes throughout the long days along the curved
dun mud road until
the world turned an empty twilight. Your absence
the big black bending trees in illusion.
I heard the rattle of time in my bones
grow louder, the empty hours curl in their brown edges.
I did not write to you
my silence was heavy with too many words.
I expected you'd come
at the culmination of my protracted wait.
You came. But by then I had already left.

I have kept our house immaculate
in my mind's attic
the tulsi mancha, the kitchen
the clock you made –you and me
lived a brief happy life here, perhaps your green nostalgia
will sometimes bring you to me.

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* Sarbajaya is Apu's mother in Satyajit Ray's Apu Trilogy based on Bibutibhushan Bandopadhyay's novels. Brief Bio: Zinia Mitra teaches in the Department of English, University of North Bengal. Her travelogues and articles have been published in *The Statesman*. Her poems have been published in National and International journals including *Muse India*, *Ruminations*, *Contemporary Literary Review*, *Kavya Bharati*, *East Lit. Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi)*, *Asian Signature*, *Teesta Review*, *Setu*. Her translations have been published in books and journals including Indian Literature (Sahitya Akademi). Her translation of Abanindranath Tagore's *Khurer Putul* has been published by Parabaas. Her translation of "Jatiner Juto" by Sukumar Ray as 'Jatin and his Sandals' is included in ICSE textbook, *A Magic Place*. Her books include *Indian Poetry in English: Critical Essays*, *Poetry of Jayanta Mahapatra: Imagery and Experiential Identity*, *Twentieth Century British Literature: Reconstructing Literary Sensibility* (co-edited), *Interact* (co-edited) and *The Concept of Motherhood in India: Myths, Theories and Realities, Fourth Wave Feminism: Social Media and (S)Activism*.

