



Karuna Bannerjee portrayed Sarbojaya Ray in Satyajit Ray's Pather Panchali (1955). Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay wrote the novel in 1929 to critical acclaim.

SARBOJAYA AND SURABALA

SYED MAQSUD JAMIL

Written words last forever. Women and children in masterly works of fiction are endearing characters. The endearment lasts a lifetime. In Bengali literature *Pather Panchali* by Bibhutibhusan Bandyopadhyay is a touching tale of the struggle of ordinary people. Apu is the protagonist of the tale but Sarbojaya the enduring mother and Durga, the mirthful village girl melts the heart. Sarbojaya is an iconic mother of dignity in distress, of perseverance in privation. In such trying circumstances the woman in the house can become contemptuous and resentful. On no occasion she is found to be dismissive of the clerical aristocracy of Harihar whenever he speaks of an opportunity of a breakthrough or when he tries to hold a picture of better days. Sarbojaya remains quietly differential of her husband. But Harihar too surrenders to fate admitting that there is no sense in burrowing into such misery for days on.

Sarbojaya's dignity never bows its head in raising her children. Durga, on the other hand, is a chirpy village girl singing the song of life. When they are unwelcome in a festivity she will not allow Apu's spirits to wilt telling him to go to a place where there is greater fun. Her sense

of zestful discovery is how she kept her mind unbound in the indignities of poverty. She takes Apu on an adventure of getting a glimpse of a locomotive chugging on billowing black smoke. The poor little girl finds a place in the heart!

Tagore is regarded as one of the three great short story writers of world literature. His *Ek Ratri* is a tale of love lost to the blunders of fanciful thinking of youth, of love that was there for asking, of fancy crashing to the realities of ordinary life and of love neglected returning so near but beyond reach.

Surabala was famed for her beauty; a charming face, a pair of lovely dark eyes and dark eyelashes. He looked on her as his own to possess as a boorish youth would think. To that extent he lorded over her sometimes subjecting her to unkind treatment. His model was Nilratan who left for the city and became a clerk in the court. So, he too went to the city! He became absorbed with fanciful thinking about his career.

News came from home that the two families were thinking of his marriage with Surabala. He informed that he did not have the time for marriage. Garibaldi and Mazzini occupied this

thinking! But he became a side kick political worker; setting chairs and tables for public meeting, pasting posters and even getting into scuffles. In the meantime Surabala had been married away to Ramlochan.

On learning that his father had suddenly died, he returned home. His dreams ended there. He became a second school master in distant Noakhali. There he learned that Ramlochan lives nearby. What designs destiny had for him there. When he visited Ramlochan's house he could hear the soft clinging of bangles, the rustle of the creases of her sari and even the sound of her footsteps. Surabala was behind the curtain.

One who could have been his for asking; she is now beyond his reach for life.

The appointed meeting came! The town was struck by a tidal bore. Ramlochan was away on business. Tidal water started rising. He took shelter on the embankment of the pond. In the darkness of the night he saw a woman taking shelter on the other side of the embankment. She was Surobala. There was no talk. Water came down, the cyclone became weaker and the night ended. The woman in the dark came down and went home. Destiny's tryst was over.

Banalata Sen

JIBANANANDA DAS

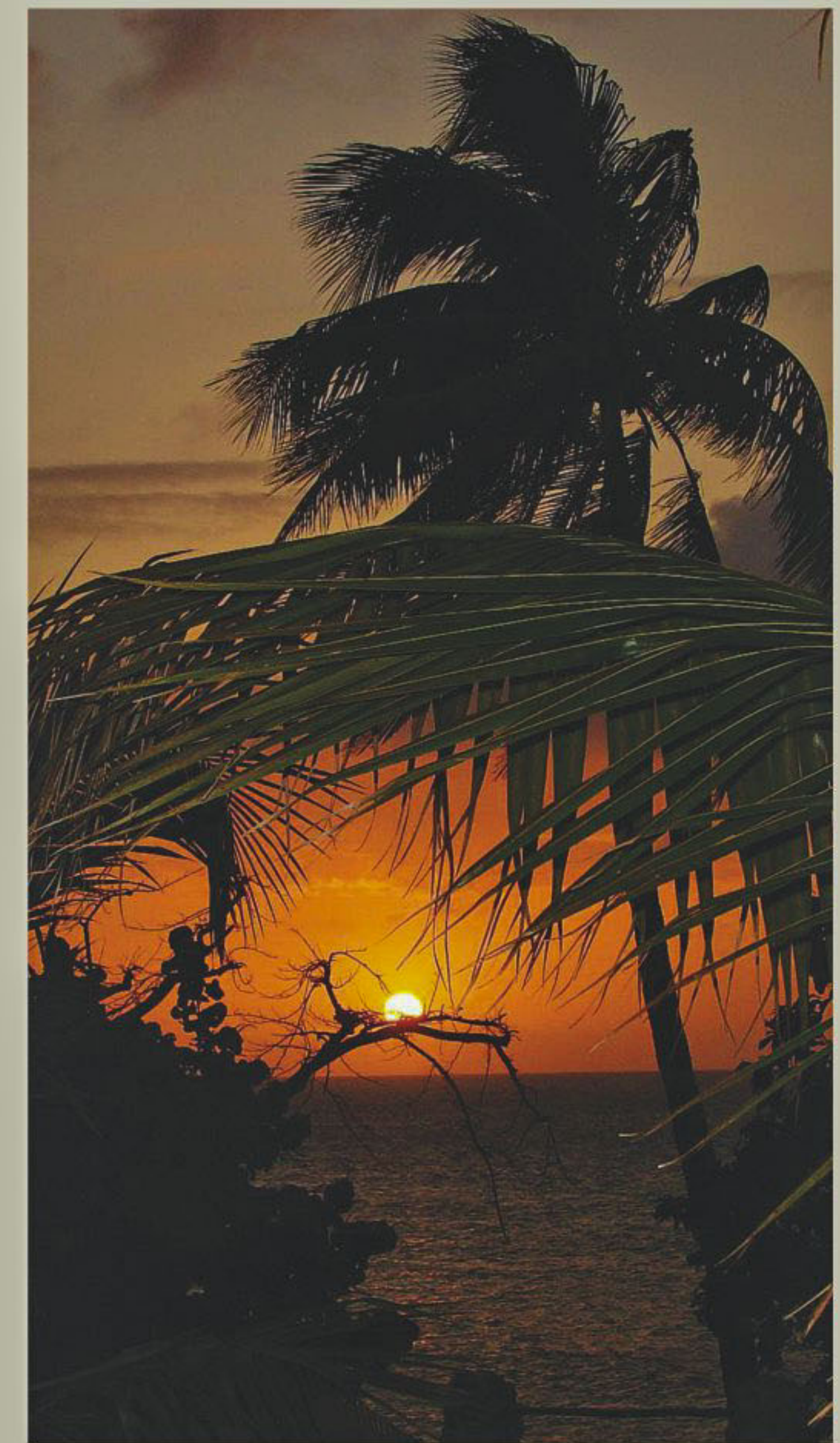
(17 February 1899 – 22 October 1954)

TRANSLATED FROM THE BENGALI BY SOFIUL AZAM

Thousands of years, I've been knocking around the world's ways, from the Ceylon waters in night's gloom to far-off Malaya sea much have I hiked; in Vimbar and Ashok's grayed kingdoms had I been there; faring further down to dark, distant Vidarbha city; I'm a weary spirit, around me life's oceanic spumes galore, was given a moment's calm or two by Banalata Sen of Natore.

Her hair was darkling as a long-distant night at Vidisha, her face Sravasti's delicate designs; as on a faraway sea the sailor with the smashed helm and far from sailing further spots with curious eyes a land of green grass in a cinnamon isle, thus did I stare at her in the dark; said she, "So long, where were you?" raising her eyes as if bird's nests, Banalata Sen of Natore.

At the end of a long day, like the drone of dew's dripping evening slinks in; kites shake the sun's smells off their wings; once the world's colors clear out, the manuscript's set for stories, in the thick of fireflies' endless glittering; all birds reel back home – all rivers too – all of this life's deals end; only the dark tarries, for me to sit across from Banalata Sen.



Tête-à-tête

SAMINA AHSAN SHAHRUKH

.... and where will you be when I feel pain?

I shall be where your pain is.

... and how will you make me unmad?

I shall kiss you long and deep.

... and how will you make me unsad?

I shall hold you tight and strong.

... and as I am so far away, how will you do all you say?

I shall colour my thoughts and whisper them in your ears.

..... but how will you whisper to me?

You will need to close your eyes and lend me your mind.

...and how will I feel you?

Let me in your consciousness and you will feel the tug in your heart.

...and how will I see you?

Your eyes will lose focus because I am in your thoughts.

... and how will I talk to you?

As you have been doing, my Precious, for I have been silent all along.



“ব্যঙ্গ-সৃষ্টিতে অসাধারণ প্রতিভার প্রয়োজন। ... বন্ধু আবুল মনসুরের হাত-সাক্ষাই দেখে বিম্বিত হলাম। ভাষার কান মলে রস সৃষ্টির ক্ষমতা আবুল মনসুরের অসাধারণ। এ যেন পাকা গুস্তাদী হাত।”

-কাজী নজরুল ইসলাম



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