Growing up with Apu, Feluda and many others

I was first introduced to Soumitra Chatterjee in my early childhood by his recitations of Sukumar Ray's "Abol Tabol," his astonishing voice kept me hooked to the record player for hours on end. Later, I first saw him as the enigmatic Feluda in the film, "Sonar Kella." Being an avid Feluda fan, this film, along with "Joi Baba Felunath" was an integral part of my childhood. Through him, I was able to fit Feluda perfectly into my imagination. Till date, I can only picture him as Feluda, every time that I revisit the books.

RASHEEK TABASSUM MONDIRA

From the young detective Feluda to Bishwanath Majumdar in "Bela Seshe" we all fell in love with Soumitra Chatterjee's bewildering charm and talent, at some point in our lives. Brimming with intensity and brilliance, his sharp gaze keeps us hooked to his characters. In "Apur Sansar" (1959), while sharing his idea of writing an autobiography, his eyes light up, his voice shakes with emotions and every one of us can relate with Apu's dreams. It is impossible to ignore his intense eyes and charm while watching his films.

The starting of Soumitra Chatterjee's acting career in cinema revolves around an interesting story involving legendary director Satyajit Ray. Ray's debut film, "Pather Panchali" came out when Soumitra Chatterjee was just a college kid. He was introduced to Ray by a friend, and he was hoping to play the lead role in "Aparajito", the second film in the Apu trilogy.

The director refused to cast Soumitra Chatterjee, as he was too tall and 'grown-up' for the part. Ray actually had no further plans to continue Apu's story after "Aparajito," but later, he decided that 24-year old Soumitra Chatterjee was perfect for the lead role in "Apur Sansar," the final film in the Apu trilogy.

The iconic director-actor duo of Satyajit Ray and Soumitra Chatterjee continued with another thirteen films throughout their careers. Soumitra Chatterjee considered it as the biggest achievement of his life.

"Our outlook and philosophy towards life, our likes and dislikes, looking at life from a certain standpoint, were common," shared Soumitra Chatterjee about Ray in an interview with journalist Shamik Bag in 2016. "There must have been a spiritual connection," the actor added, as many considered him to be Ray's alter ego.

As the audience, we fell in love with Apu's simplistic charm in "Apur Sansar," we were attracted to Sandip's revolutionary characteristics in "Ghare Baire" (1985) and we shared Amal's perplexing dilemma in "Charulata,"

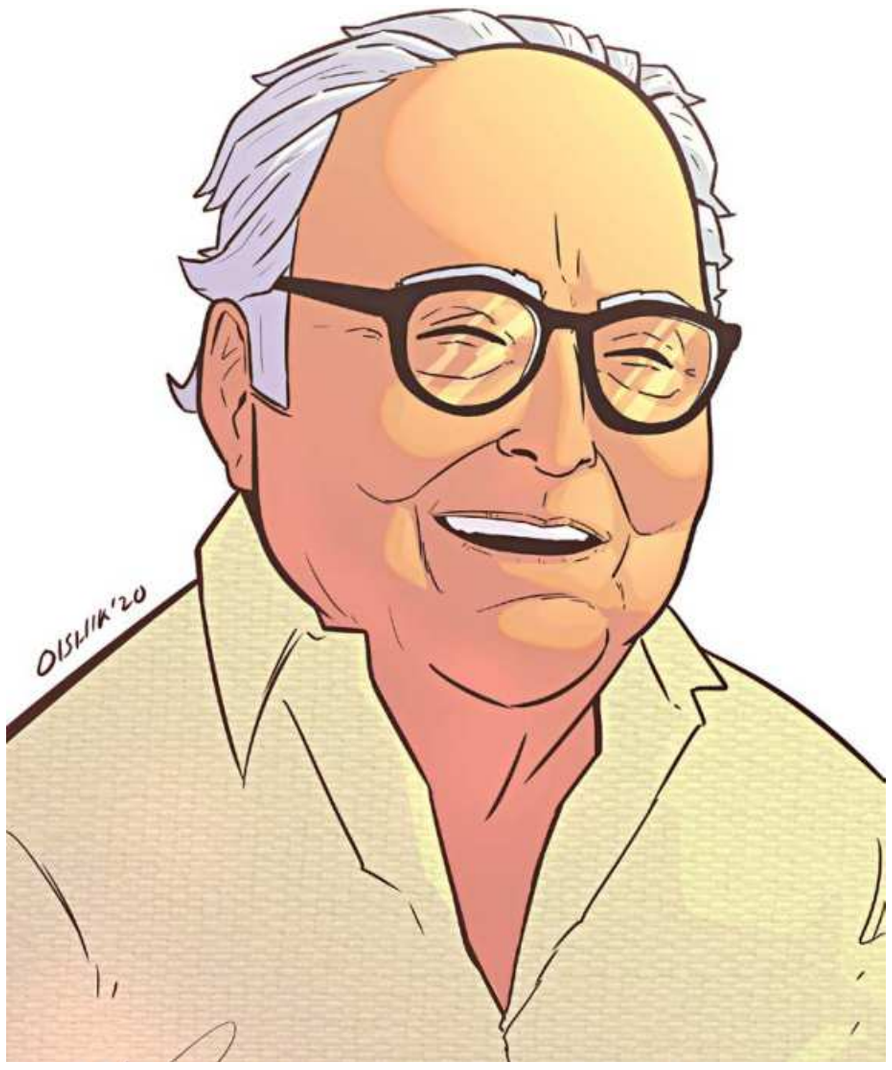

ILLUSTRATION: **OISHIK JAWAD**

(1964). Soumitra Chatterjee also worked with Ray in classics such as "Hirak Rajar Deshe", "Ashani Sanket", "Devi'", "Abhijan", "Aranyer Din Ratri" and "Ganashatru" among others.

Apart from Ray, he worked with other legendary filmmakers such as Mrinal Sen, Tarun Majumdar and Tapan Sinha on several films. Tapan Sinha's "Kshudhita Pashan" (1960), Asit Sen's "Swayambara" (1961), and Mrinal Sen's "Punascha" (1961), among others, are notable mentions. In the 1980s and 1990s, he started working with contemporary directors Goutam Ghose, Aparna Sen, Anjan Das and Rituparno Ghosh, among others.

As Mayur-Vahan, the swashbuckling horse-riding villain in Tapan Sinha's "Jhinder Bandi" (1961), alongside legendary actor Uttam Kumar, Soumitra Chatterjee proved his versatility as an artiste.

At a time when Uttam Kumar and his roles as the romantic hero captivated the audience, Soumitra Chatterjee's emergence as an actor changed the mainstream idea of a protagonist. We could relate to his portrayals of an ordinary man; he was not necessarily the 'hero' or the 'lover.' We see a reflection of ourselves in the characters Soumitra masterfully portrayed onto the screen.

Listening to Kishore Kumar's Rabindra Sangeet "Ami Chini Go Chini Tomare", Manna Dey's "Hoytoh Tomari Jonnyo", and "Jibone Ki Pabona," among other timeless classics picturised on Soumitra Chatterjee's characters, is always a delightful experience for the fans.

He started his career on the stage, and considered thespian Sisir Bhaduri as his mentor. He went on to become an icon in the theatre arena. Apart from acting, Soumitra Chatterjee was also known for his exceptional talents as a playwright, poet, painter and theatre director.

"Dori Dhore Maro Taan, Raja Hobe Khan Khan", Soumitra Chatterjee's iconic line from Ray's "Hirak Rajar Deshe", is still relevant today, and used by revolutionists from all walks of life.

Soumitra Chatterjee's powerful voice also earned him the title of one of the most prominent elocutionists in Bengal. His strong command and his undeniable love for Bengali literature and language, made him decline several offers in Hindi films. He devoted himself to films in Kolkata, wholeheartedly.

"The end is inevitable and it is useless to be afraid of it," shared the cancer survivor, in an interview with Amit Roy in 2009 in London. "My time has become shorter now, I can almost see the end. I am not afraid of dying."

Although we mourn Soumitra Chatterjee's passing with heavy hearts, he will live among us through the beloved Apu, Feluda and Bishwanath Majumdar, among countless other mesmerising characters.

Rasheek Tabassum Mondira is an authentic night-owl and an actual zombie throughout the day. She loves binge-watching, reading and writing. If you want to chat about anything and everything in life, mail her at rasheektmondira@gmail.com.

When I met Apu

APURBA JAHANGIR

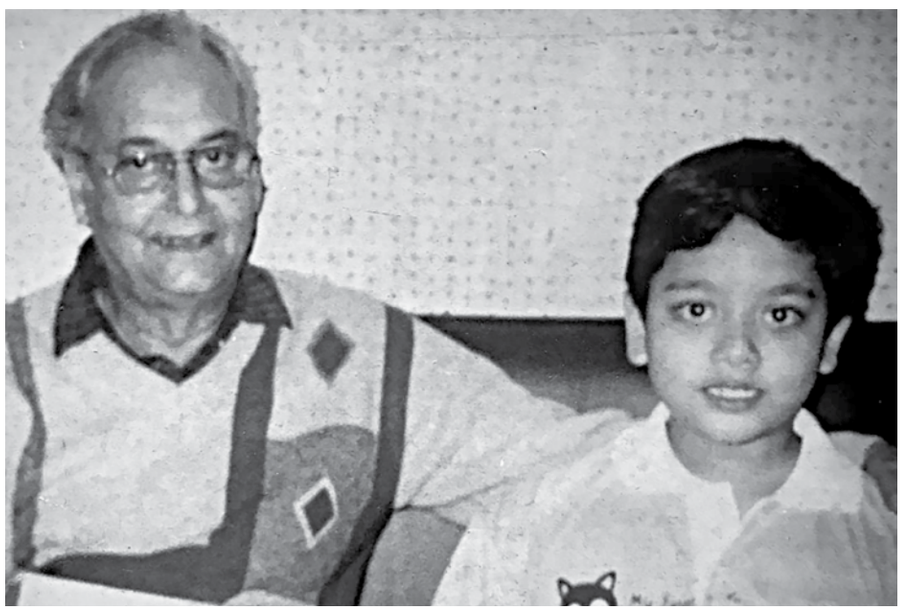

PHOTO: **COURTESY OF APURBA JAHANGIR**

My introduction to Soumitra Chatterjee happened in a strange way. It was in the early 2000s, around the month of September, when Nrityanchal used to host dance festivals of three or four days.

My *Abba*, Muhammad Jahangir, being one of the founders and coordinators of Nrityanchal, the joy of these festivals used to be evident in our household as well. But I remember, the family was a bit too excited for this particular one. As a 10-year-old, I saw my father's eyes beaming with excitement, the smell of jasmine perfume on my mother was more than usual, and my sister wore the best *shari* she owned. I only knew that Feluda was in town! We were off to see Nrityanchal's 'Soumitra Shondha'.

Now, I was accustomed to Feluda, as movies like "Sonar Kella" and "Joi Baba Felunath" were my after-school entertainment, and so, I was ecstatic to be meeting P C Mitter in person. Now, the thought of people aging was yet to be established in my 10-year-old mind. Consequently, I was a bit disappointed after seeing him. He looked nothing like he did in the movies! I remember he was wearing a dark blue *punjabi*, with a grey *shawl* over it, and the first thing he said to me was, *"Baah! Tumio Apu!*(Wow! You're Apu too!)

At the show, he recited Rabindranath Tagore and talked about working with Satyajit Ray. He read excerpts from *Apur Sansar, Charulata,* and *Ghare Baire*. Everyone at that Shilpakala Academy hall was in awe of Soumitra, but I was just bored out of my mind, because he didn't talk about Feluda!

After the show my father and I hopped into his designated car and I remember, people were all over the windows just to see a glimpse of the actor. I really didn't get what the big deal was. I wish I had known back then.

We were stuck in traffic, when he suddenly turned around and said, *"Apu,Tomar kemon laaglo ajke?*(Apu, how did you like today?)

He didn't have to ask me, he already knew what happened in that auditorium. Yet, he asked in such a way that I was somewhat his equal. I was amused, but I managed to reply, *" Apnar .32 Colt ta to dekhalen na*(You didn't show your .32 Colt).

We went to an after party, and it was filled with familiar faces. Renowned artistes were there, trying to have a meaningful conversation with the man who was the face of Bangali cinema. For a 10 year old, it was a bit overwhelming, so I tried to concentrate on the buffet. Around the end of the party as I was hopelessly roaming around trying to figure out when will this be over, I spotted the man, sitting beside my mother and our eyes connected. He called me by hand.

When I stood in front of him, he held my hand and said, *"Shuno, amra duijon e Apu, kintu ami hocchi nokol Apu ar tumi hoccho ashol Apu.*(Listen, we're both Apu, but I am the fictional Apu and you're the real Apu). Now, I don't know what happened back then, or what he meant by it. All I remember is that my mother was weeping as he said it.

To this day, I don't know what he meant by it, but I am truly lucky that he said it to me. Now as a filmmaker and a fan of cinema, I could've gone on about how amazing of an actor Soumitra was or how he portrayed Apu in *Apur Sansar* in such a charming manner, but I won't, because to me, Soumitra Chatterjee is very personal.

The beloved character, Apu, is my namesake, and Soumitra is one of the reasons that I fell in love with cinema to begin with.

They say that when you're named after someone, you inherit some of their qualities. Now I don't know if that's true but somewhere in the back of my mind, I would like to believe it is — and to me, he will always be the real Apu.

Apurba Jahangir is a filmmaker, writer and an entrepreneur. Find him @apurba_jahangir on Instagram.

www.youthop.com
YOUTH OPPORTUNITIES

One Young World Virtual Scholarship Program 2021 by Johnson & Johnson

The Johnson & Johnson Global Community Impact Team supports and champions the people on the front lines who are at the heart of delivering care. The Team leads the global Johnson & Johnson partnership with One Young World and believes that changing the trajectory of health for humanity requires putting people first so that communities and health systems have the ability to address the health needs of the world's most vulnerable people. Through its global and community-based partnerships and programs, the Team aims to support the next generation of global and community-based health leaders to develop the skills and tools they need to drive health and well-being in underserved communities.

DEADLINE: November 27, 2020 | Scholarships

Deutsche Welle (DW) Traineeship 2021

DW is looking for young people from all over the world interested in a comprehensive, exceptional quality journalism program with an international broadcaster. Candidates should have journalism experience or be passionate about switching to journalism from technology/IT, economics or the sciences. DW is looking for open-minded people full of creative ideas.

DEADLINE: November 27, 2020 | Internships

Youth Opportunities Campus Ambassador Program 2021

Youth Opportunities is launching the 3rd season of its Campus Ambassador Program for the aspiring youth of Bangladesh. The program aims at empowering the youth as changemakers in their institutions to promote different aspects of global and local opportunities among their fellow students so that they can avail of these opportunities and transform them into successes.

DEADLINE: November 20, 2020 | Volunteer Service