

Revisiting Soumitra Chatterjee's iconic roles



Satyajit Ray and Soumitra Chatterjee



Madhabi Mukherjee and Soumitra Chatterjee in 'Charulata'.



Soumitra Chatterjee as Feluda in 'Sonar Kella'



With Babita in 'Ashani Sanket'.

SHABABA IQBAL

We recently lost one of the most celebrated Bengali actors with the demise of Soumitra Chatterjee. Having started his film career in 1959, the actor went on to play an array of memorable characters over the years. He received the Padma Bhushan in 2004. He was also honoured with the 2011 Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the Government of India's highest award in cinema for lifetime achievement. In 2018, he received France's highest civilian award, the Legion of Honour. Although Chatterjee's importance in the world of cinema can be talked about for days on end, his greater legacy is that of an artiste whose passion for his craft was unparalleled. That being said, here are only a few of Soumitra Chatterjee's iconic performances.

Apu in Apur Sansar (1959)

The third and final installment of Satyajit Ray's Apu trilogy marked Chatterjee's silver screen debut, as well as the beginning of a cinematic relationship of both collaboration and mentoring between Ray and him. The actor's cerebral presence and meticulous delivery as Apu is remarkable, while the fiery chemistry between him and Sharmila Tagore is unforgettable.

Mayur-Vahan in Jhinder Bandi (1961)

Audiences saw the first proper exploration of Chatterjee's acting range in director Tapan Sinha's "Jhinder Bandi", based on a novel by Saradindu Bandyopadhyay, which in turn was inspired by Anthony Hope's "The Prisoner of Zenda." Chatterjee was uncharacteristically cast in the villainous role of Mayur-Vahan against Uttam Kumar's conventional hero. Scenes featuring the two titans and sarod maestro Ali Akbar Khan's compositions make it a memorable film.

Narsingh in Abhijan (1962)

Chatterjee was a fascinating choice to play Narsingh in "Abhijan". His character is a cynical and hot-headed taxi driver who struggles to balance passion, pride and guilt. Chatterjee highlighted the complexity and ambiguity of the taxi driver brilliantly. His chemistry with Waheeda Rahman as Gulabi and Ruma Guha Thakurta as Neeli in the film is wonderful.

Amal in Charulata (1964)

Perhaps the pinnacle of Satyajit Ray's cinematic achievement, "Charulata", based on Rabindranath Tagore's story, was also a milestone in Chatterjee's

career. He portrayed the naive and energy of artistic aspiration as Amal with brilliance and sensitivity. The forbidden love between Charulata (Madhabi Mukherjee) and Amal is remembered fondly to this day.

Subir in Teen Bhubaner Pare (1969)

One of Chatterjee's most popular films, "Teen Bhubaner Pare" was a turning point in his career. The film, directed by Ashutosh Bandyopadhyay, was a huge hit, owing largely to the compositions of Sudhin Dasgupta and Chatterjee's performance as the working-class hero



Soumitra Chatterjee and Swatilekha Chatterjee in 'Ghare Baire'.

Subir, who tries to juggle the energetic spirit of youth with societal expectations. Chatterjee's carefree dance to the tune of "Jibone Ki Pabo Na Bhulechi Shey Bhabona" is a delightful watch.

Doctor Gangacharan in Ashani Sanket (1973)

Set against the backdrop of the devastating Bengal famine of 1943, Satyajit Ray's "Ashani Sanket" is a significant film. Doctor Gangacharan, played by Chatterjee, highlighted the greater realities of the struggles of rural India in the face of poverty and starvation. Chatterjee picked up the Nadia dialect used in the film and the

mannerisms of the rural populace, by accompanying the director for location scouting. The film stars noted actor Babita, alongside Chatterjee.

Shyam in Basanta Bilap (1973)

This romantic comedy released when Chatterjee was at the peak of his career, and it was unlike most other films that he had acted in. It is his third film with Aparna Sen. The plot revolves around a group of women who live in a working women's hostel, and their hilarious interactions with a group of four boys from the neighbourhood. This film is a celebration

Udayan Pandit in Heerak Rajar Deshe (1980)

Chatterjee's performance as Udayan Pandit in Satyajit Ray's "Heerak Rajar Deshe" left quite a mark on the minds of cinemagoers. Even though Goopy and Bagha save the day with their magical powers, it is Udayan Pandit who starts a revolution in his quiet and level-headed way in the dystopian world of the film. Udayan Pandit is the only character who does not speak in rhyme, symbolising that although everyone else's thoughts are bound, he is a free thinker.



'Apu' Sansar' featured Soumitra with Sharmila Tagore.



Soumitra in 'Abhijan'.

Sandip in Ghare Baire (1984)

The story of "Ghare Baire", based on Rabindranath Tagore's novel of the same name, is set in 1907 on the estate of the rich Bengali noble Nikhilesh (Victor Banerjee). In the chaotic aftermath of Lord Curzon's partition of Bengal into Muslim and Hindu states, the nationalist movement tries to impose a boycott of foreign goods by claiming that imports are at the root of Indian poverty. In the film, Chatterjee played Sandip, a nationalist battling the British through the Swadeshi movement. The actor always spoke out on controversial issues such as societal intolerance.

GOODBYE APU

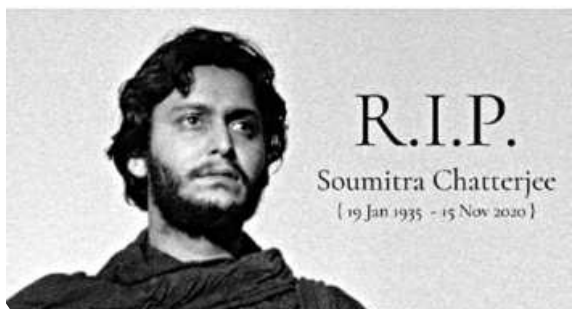
Stars mourn Soumitra Chatterjee's demise

ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Stars in the entertainment industry mourned the loss of one of the brightest minds to grace the silver screen. Here are a select few of the heartfelt tributes from Soumitra's fans within the industry.

Chanchal Chowdhury
Yesterday at 6:17 PM · 🌐

অবনত শ্রদ্ধা 🙏🙏
হে কিংবদন্তী অভিনেতা...
সৌমিত্র চট্টোপাধ্যায়



Tariq Anam Khan
2 h · 🌐

অপু আজ চলে গেল !!!
অবধারিত ছিল এই যাওয়া । তবু মনে মনে বড় আশা ছিল এই যুদ্ধে
অপু জিতবে ।
লড়াই করেছেন শেষ পর্যন্ত ।
আমৃত্যু শিল্পে নিবেদিত মানুষ সৌমিত্র চট্টোপাধ্যায় ।
আমার, আমাদের শিক্ষক । কণ্ঠ, উচ্চারণ, আবৃত্তি, স্বাভাবিক চরিত্রানুগ
অভিনয়, চরম নির্ভা কত কিছু !!! সর্বোপরি বাংলার... See more

Jaya Ahsan
15 November at 14:12 · 🌐

পদায় তিনি যখন অভিনয়ের গরিমায় বেড়ে ফেলে চরিত্রের আচরণ ফুটিয়ে তুলেছিলেন, ভারতবর্ষের শিল্পভূমিতে সেটা শুধু বিশ্বাস্যকর একটা ঘটনাই ছিল না, ছিল এক নতুন যুগের শুরু। বিশ্ব-চলচ্চিত্রের অভিনয়ের প্রথম সারিতেই তাঁর স্থান। কিন্তু অমেন যে ইতিহাসের স্রষ্টা, অমেন যে শিখার ওশা শিল্পী, মানুষ হিসেবে তিনি ছিলেন এক মহাসাগর। যে মহাসাগর অতলান্ত, কিন্তু শান্ত।
তাঁর মৃত্যু নেই

Aamir Khan
1 hr · 🌐

Indian Cinema has lost one of its leading lights. My heartfelt condolences to Soumitraji's family, and to all his fans. His work will continue to bring joy to all of us.
RIP Shri Soumitra Chatterjee 🙏

Nawazuddin Siddiqui is with Shubham Nimbalkar and 5 others.
15 November at 18:04 · 🌐

It's a huge loss to the world of Art & Cinema - The Great Thespian #SoumitraChatterjee bids his last goodbye leaving behind an extremely rich legacy to be cherished forever.
Rest In Peace 🙏

Anupam Roy is in Kolkata.
6 h · 🌐

শুধু আমার বুকের ভেতর মৃত নদীর মতো শীতে,
তুমি আমার থেকে দূরে হেঁটে চলে গেছ রোজ,
ওভাবে কেন ডাকো আমাকে? #SoumitraChattopadhyay 🙏

PRIYANKA CHOWDHURY

It is no secret that Feluda was Satyajit Ray's answer to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes. Nonetheless, for at least three generations, Feluda has been a household name in most Bengali families. When Ray brought Detective P C Mitter from pages to the screen, his hand drawn illustrations hinted to just one name—Soumitra Chatterjee.



Soumitra as 'Feluda'.

Among the novels and stories that Ray wrote especially for young readers, the detective stories of Feluda are by far the most popular. With calculated amounts of wit, humour, suspense and action, these stories are considered classics of Bengali literature — so, it is not surprising that Ray directed two of them for the big screen. Soumitra made a cult figure of Ray's famous detective, playing the role in the two blockbusters, "Sonar Kella" (1974) and "Joi Baba Felunath" (1979).

Over time, the role has been reprised by many talented Bengali actors, but Soumitra's portrayal of Feluda remains iconic.

If Feluda is Holmes, the role of Watson goes to his goody two shoes cousin Topshe. Feluda also has the very Bengali, bumbling pulp writer, Lalmoohan-babu, also known as Jatayu, by his side.

"Sonar Kella" takes Feluda and his associates to Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, in search of the 'Golden Fortress' while fighting off criminals. The film is a



thriller, with a bellyful of laughs. In "Joi Baba Felunath", the characters take on the dreaded criminal mastermind Maganlal Meghraj in Varanasi. These films left quite a mark on my mind, as a young viewer.

Soumitra was 5 feet and 11.5 inches tall, while Feluda's height is 6 feet and 2 inches on the pages. The actor's appearance held an uncanny resemblance to the detective.

Many believe that Ray made Feluda's illustrations with Soumitra in mind. Similarly, the character of Jatayu truly resembles actor Santosh Dutta. However, on numerous occasions, Soumitra suggested that Feluda actually is like Ray.

While many have downgraded Ray's two Feluda films as being more popular than intellectual, Soumitra's brilliant portrayal of the detective charmed audiences across different generations.

Ray's passion for riddles, as impersonated by Feluda, is also significant. For instance, in "Joi Baba Felunath", when Ruku challenges Feluda with, *Panch bhai ek sath, marche ghushi khache bhat, aro panch sathe tar, kemon achen, Nomoskar*, solving the riddle, Feluda displays his ten fingers with a memorable smirk.

When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote the 'death' of Sherlock Holmes, the author was under immense pressure to bring him back to life. Unfortunately, for the Bengali audience, the demise of the on-screen Feluda is an irreplaceable loss. Nonetheless, Soumitra Chatterjee's legacy as the Charminar-smoking, curious detective will keep him ageless and immortal in our hearts.

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