

Remembering the ‘unknown’ Soumitra, a ‘cricketing rival’ to his mentor Satyajit Ray

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Soumitra Chattopadhyay and Satyajit Ray in shot discussion. Pic Courtesy: Twitter

They had worked in as many as 14 films together in three decades. Some of Soumitra Chattopadhyay’s memorable works were crafted by none other than Satyajit Ray, whose films received critical acclaim and brought home several prestigious awards worldwide, and put India on the world cinema map.

But not many people know Soumitra who passed away on November 15 after his long battle against COVID-19 once appeared as a rival to Ray, his mentor, on the 22 yards!

“Soumitra Chattopadhyay was a big admirer of cricket. He, my father Dileep Mukherjee, and Soumendu Roy (Satyajit Ray’s most trusted cinematographer) used to live nearby and were addicted to sports. They would often meet each other to have a game of cricket. Not just the gentleman’s game but also badminton, football. They were sports fanatic and to see them trying their hands in sports was a treat to watch,” recalls former Bengal cricket team all-rounder Joydeep Mukherjee in an exclusive chat with ETimes.



Have a close look at this particular photo from the 70s. You can see ahead of a charity match, it's march past – among others Master Babloo (holding aloft the flag), Satyajit Ray leading the Hemanta Kumar XI, and Jahar Ganguly the captain of Kanan Devi's XI. While Uttam Kumar walks just behind Satyajit Ray, it was Soumitra Chatterjee who can be seen as Jahar Ganguly's deputy.

Interestingly, this was not a one-off thing.

In a historical charity match for the Kerala floods from the late '70s played between the Kolkata Film Industry and Mumbai film Industry at Eden Gardens, Soumitra played a crucial role for the Bengal team.

“The Mumbai team had big names like Amitabh Bachchan, Vinod Khanna among others. More than 100,000 people were at the ground to witness the historic match. Soumitra Chattopadhyay, was a key member at the dressing room, planning how to play and what field formations to be set,” added Mukherjee who is currently the Director of Cricket, Cricket Association of Bengal (CAB).

“He was one of the most respected members of the Kolkata team. He had batted quite well and came handy with the ball also. From my childhood memory I can still remember him being so focused and taking the decisions on who will be given the new ball bowl considering which side the breeze was blowing,” Mukherjee further revealed.

Soumitra Chattopadhyay not even missed an international cricket match at the Eden till the 1980s.

When we spoke to former Bengal captain and national selector Sambaran Banerjee he revealed the legendary actor's addiction to the game saying he was a cricket admirer who used to keep an eye almost everything in world cricket.

“He had a great love for Test cricket. He had once told me that he never ever missed a cricket match at Eden Gardens in the '60s, '70s, and '80s,” Banerjee told.

Later in his life, during an interview on the official social media channel of Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR), the thespian had admitted his love for cricket and said, “At one time long back, I used to be an avid fan of cricket. Even now when some cricket is going back in some parts of the globe I generally follow the news.”

“But I would like to see someone like Ajinkya Rahane playing for Knight Riders and I would like to see a devastating bowler coming to KKR,” he had said.

His demise shocked Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) President Sourav Ganguly also as he mourned the tragic demise of the legendary actor. “U have done so much ..u can rest in peace,” Ganguly, also a former India captain, had tweeted.

Before starting his film journey in 1959, the iconic figure of Indian cinema used to work as an announcer at All India Radio in Kolkata. He had been an accomplished playwright and a poet as well.

In a 2016 interview, Soumitra Chatterjee had displayed his indomitable spirit to act braving all the age related issues. “I have a fear: If I don't work, I won't exist,” he had said.

Reference:

<https://m.timesofindia.com/entertainment/bengali/movies/news/remembering-the-unknown-soumitra-a-cricketing-rival-to-his-mentor-satyajit-ray/articleshow/79242855.cms>