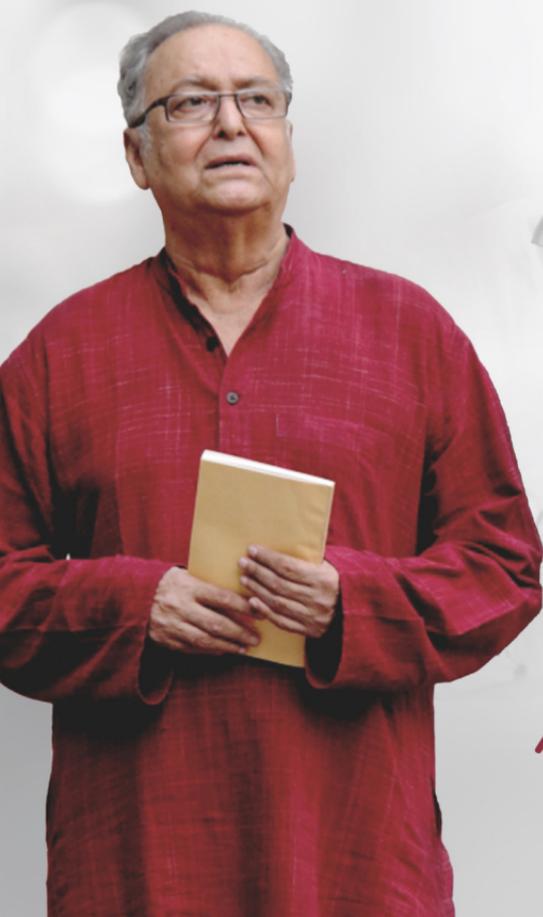


"There are moments, nicely portrayed, where the man is in a commotion that he knows would never subside. It's this rambling reflection of the luminous vulnerability that sets the book apart." —**ATANU GHOSH**

# MURMURS

*Silent Steals with  
Soumitra Chatterjee*



**AMITAVA NAG**

FOREWORD

**SHYAM BENEAL**



## *About the Author*

**Amitava Nag** is an independent film critic based in Kolkata and editor of *Silhouette* ([www.silhouette-magazine.com](http://www.silhouette-magazine.com)). His most recent books on cinema are *16 Frames* and *Smriti Satta o Cinema*. His earlier writings include the acclaimed books *Satyajit Ray's Heroes and Heroines* and *Beyond Apu: 20 Favourite Film Roles of Soumitra Chatterjee*.

Amitava also writes poetry and short fiction in Bengali and English – observing life in a platter. His poetry collection *Forever Meera* and translation anthology of Soumitra Chatterjee's English poems titled *Walking Through the Mist* were published in 2020. He can be reached at [www.amitavanag.net](http://www.amitavanag.net).

## *Praise for the Book*

“Life is not a series of gill lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.” Remembered Virginia Woolf from ‘Modern Fiction’ going through this book. First, because of the narrative style, the stream of consciousness, which strikes a chord with the range and density of internal reflections synonymous with Soumitra Chatterjee. Second, for exploring the random slices of thoughts, feelings, moods, and observations that defy design and in fact, often indulge in disharmony. Some of his words are definite and even conclusive. Or, he is ambivalent at times. He is hopeful, and yet he is doubtful. There are moments, nicely portrayed, where the man is in a commotion that he knows would never subside. Yet he moves on, trying to navigate with empathy, creativity, and curiosity. It’s this rambling reflection of the luminous vulnerability that sets the book apart.

**Atanu Ghosh**

# MURMURS

*Silent Steals with  
Soumitra Chatterjee*

AMITAVA NAG



BLUE PENCIL

## **BLUE PENCIL**

A Venture of Wisitech InfoSolutions Pvt Ltd  
76/2, 3rd Floor, East of Kailash, New Delhi-110065  
Ph: 9582849600, 9811951557  
Email: sales@bluepencilpublishers.com  
www.bluepencilpublishers.com

### **Copyright © Amitava Nag 2021**

First published by Blue Pencil 2021  
Amitava Nag asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

The views and opinions expressed in this work are the author's own and the facts are as reported by him, and the publisher is in no way liable for the same. Pictures used in this book have been provided by the author.

Cover Design: Blue Pencil

**ISBN: 978-81-943921-1-8**

### **All rights are reserved.**

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the author.

For information regarding special discounts for bulk purchases, please contact Blue Pencil Special Sales at +91 95828 49600 or sales@bluepencilpublishers.com

Printed at: Saurabh Printers Pvt Ltd, Greater Noida

*This book is for my son Akash – who  
teaches me every day the finer nuances  
of living*

*And...*

*Soumitra Chatterjee, who allowed me to  
have a glimpse of an artist as a human  
being*



# Contents



Foreword	ix
· <i>Trees</i>	01
· <i>Tension</i>	03
· <i>Letters and interviews</i>	05
· <i>Water</i>	08
· <i>Care</i>	10
· <i>Pain</i>	12
· <i>Acting</i>	16
· <i>Sir Garfield Sobers</i>	19
· <i>Father</i>	23
· <i>Three words and a pause</i>	27
· <i>Cigarettes</i>	31
· <i>Quizás, quizás, quizás</i>	35
· <i>No one escapes Death</i>	38
· <i>Portraits</i>	43
· <i>Makeup</i>	47
· <i>Rejection</i>	52
· <i>Saturation</i>	56
· <i>Fear eats the soul</i>	59
· <i>Horizon</i>	63
· <i>Outro</i>	67
Acknowledgement	71
Trivia on Soumitra Chatterjee	72
Accolades	73



# Foreword



Soumitra Chatterjee was one of those extraordinary actors who straddled both the Theatre and Cinema with equal ease. A thinking actor whose performances eliminated that fine line distinction between performing and being. He made any role offered to him, his very own. It was as though no one else could play that part anymore. Very much like the great Bengali cultural icons before him, such as Rabindranath Tagore and Satyajit Ray, Soumitra Chatterjee was a man of many talents; actor, writer, poet, painter – in short, a renaissance man.

In the films of Satyajit Ray, he totally personified what Ray had in mind or imagined – it was as if they thought and responded exactly alike to the world in which they lived and belonged.

About four decades ago, I wanted to cast him in my film *Kalyug* as Shashi Kapoor's older brother. He was required to speak in Hindi as it was a Hindi language film. Being the perfectionist that he was, he declined the part, as he felt he did not know the language well enough to speak in the film, nor would he allow his voice to be dubbed. In short, I lost the one opportunity I

had to work with him.

*Murmurs – Silent Steals with Soumitra Chatterjee* is a marvelous portrait of this great actor. You get to hear him, know him, in an extraordinarily intimate fashion. Once you have finished reading these musings of Soumitra Chatterjee, it is as though you were listening to a close friend, almost a confidant.

**Shyam Benegal**

December 17, 2020

# Trees



Trees listen to us humans. Certain trees do more than others, in every corner of the earth. Trees inhale whispers that roam around the city speaking of the dead. They become friends; trees outlive us, see life as a whole, forgive and remember.

I remember addresses through trees. Not the names, but the shapes, sizes, colour, fragrance, frames. Probably because I tend to write I find stories in trees, about their tresses. Always. Addresses without trees are barren, unidentifiable, lost.

Trees, to me define gravity, balance space, murmur peace and arrest time. Trees make us believe that life has been the same, and also that it has flown down our winter sleep.

Trees remind us of timelessness. Eternity.

Trees also connote shelter, shade, support. The green interconnect between the red earth and the blue sky.

‘Gaach’, in Bengali meaning tree, is the name of the first documentary on *him*.

My friend Catherine Berge, of mesmeric energy and French efficacy looked for the roots in search of a tree.

I watched it first twenty years ago, in Brussels after a vegetarian dinner in the cozy, half-lit apartment of Bo van der Werf.

'Gaach' reminds me of time standing still. Looking at the unrepeatabe moments of time.

Soumitra Chatterjee reminds me of the same – the unrepeatabe moments of standing still.

# Tension



‘Call *him* at 3 pm. *He* will be at a shooting, but probably will have a break then,’ Atanu-da announced over cellphone. I had requested him if he could speak to Soumitra Chatterjee and fix a short interview slot for me.

This was the end of August in 2009. Fifty years of *his* acting career. I wanted to ask a few questions on this journey.

‘I will take half an hour, just that,’ I pleaded with Atanu-da. Atanu-da was just one film old then. *Anshumaner Chhabi* was an intense personal film with frailties and Atanu-da was just shaping up to be a sensitive film maker. And, beyond all these, a friend indeed.

1995. I was still languishing the last year in our quarter allotted to the teachers of Jadavpur University. My father used to teach Physics there.

1995. We got the first telephone from Calcutta Telephones. No, not the heavy, black dialer ones. Rather, it was with sleek black buttons on a creamy white base and a maroon bottom.

I called *him* once, having found *his* name in the

Telephone Directory, to hear *his* voice. And twice did I persuade my best friend to accompany me when I stood as a shadow outside *his* gated residence in Golf Green.

Why I never mustered courage to walk in is unknown. I might have feared the feeling to be lost and unwelcome. What if the experience left me bitter?

I have this known fear to meet the unknown. I do need to relieve myself seeking toilets, I sweat through the collars of my half-sleeve bush shirts regularly and more often than not I awkwardly pull the gun before the bullets are even loaded.

Not once, but more, I encountered sturdy women blocking the entrance of their doorway demanding justification for my appearances. I have been asked to leave in the same dispassionate way that I made myself to approach. As I dragged myself out of the groove, slowly I have seen paper balls and occasional pebbles thrown at me, missing me just by a whisker. Surely, a paper ball is not a bullet piercing the tiny vessels of my heart. Yet, in this imagined violence a damage is surely done. You may ask if I ever, reaching the farthest my aim provided me with, look back and hurl one at them. Yes, I did always and missed never. But that is another story.

Soumitra Chatterjee asked me to call again a week later and then again till we finalized a date.

18 October 2009, Sunday.

End of the sample preview.

Enjoyed what you were reading?

**Buy Now!**