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Film Subjects	Shatranj ke khilari (The chess players), Ray, Satyajit, 1977

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THE CHESS PLAYERS
Fact Sheet

Indian Title:	Shatranj ke Khilari
Color:	Eastman Color by Gemini
Running Time:	135 minutes Footage: 11,000
Dialogue in English and Hindi	with subtitles
Director:	Satyajit Ray
Producer:	Suresh Jindal (for Devki Chitra Production)
Screenplay and Music:	Satyajit Ray
Dialogue:	Satyajit Ray, Shama Zaidi, Javed Siddiqi
Cinematography:	Soumendu Roy
Art Director:	Bansi Chandragupta
Choreography:	Birju Maharaj
Costumes:	Shama Zaidi
Sound:	Narinder Singh
Editing:	Dulal Dutta
Prod. Exec.:	Anil Chowdhury

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Starring:	Richard Attenborough as General Outram
	Sanjeev Kumar as Mirza Sajjad Ali
	Saeed Jaffrey as Mir Roshan Ali
	Shabana Azmi as Mirza's wife
	Amzad Khan as Mawah Wajid Ali Shah
Also staring:	Tom Alter
	David
	Agha

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STORY SYNOPSIS

THE CHESS PLAYERS presents two simultaneous stories of colonial India a century ago. The parallel images of a game among men and another game between nations are woven together, with the chess playing noblemen making moves which mirror the confrontation between Britain and India. As the two Indian noblemen concentrate on their private game, with little at stake besides their personal egos, a more dangerous game is being played around them by government leaders. The British have already brought nine of India's states under colonial rule and now are pushing into the state of Avadh, home of the chess players.

The film is set in 1856 in Lucknow, the capital of Avadh, a state governed by Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (Amjad Khan). The Nawab is an indifferent ruler but a fine poet and musician.

In Lucknow two friends, Mirza Sajjad Ali (Sanjeev Kumar) and Mir Roshan Ali (Saeed Jaffrey), are continually playing chess. Mirza's neglected wife would like her husband to cease his obsession, but Mir's wife encourages her husband to play so that she can carry on an affair with her cousin.

Meanwhile, a bigger game of chess -- a political one -- is being played by the British East India Company. The Governor General, Lord Dalhousie has decided to use the Nawab's misrule in Avadh as a pretext for deposing him and installing British control. Under instructions from Dalhousie, General Outram, (Richard Attenborough), the British Resident (commandant) in Lucknow, presents his ultimatum to the Nawab.

Mir and Mirza learn that the British East India Company's troops are approaching Lucknow. Their main concern is that they might not be able to continue playing chess under British rule. Mortally afraid that they may be called upon to fight

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for their King,the two friends run away from home and continue to play chess, picnic style, in a ruined mosque in a secluded village, far from the gathering political storm. However, as anxious as they were to avoid fighting for their ruler, Mir and Mirza almost come to mortal blows over their game.

Meanwhile in Avadh, the Nawab is faced with a situation in which he must either give up his throne or fight the British, with whom he and his predecessors have been friendly for more than a century. The Nawab decides on a moral victory and surrenders.

The British march into Lucknow, and Avadh passes into the hands of the Company. As dusk falls, the two chess playing friends are reconciled and resume playing their game of bloodless combat.

The film is based on a story by Premchand, but Ray has made considerable changes, largely because of additional research which he was able to do on the period and events. In addition, the Ray script brings out more about the wives of the chess players and the lives at the Nawab's court.

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THE CHESS PLAYERS

(SHATRANJ KE KHILARI) A Film by Satyajit Ray

SHORT TAKES

"How do you make an obsession with chess interesting?" Satyajit Ray asked himself and his colleagues as self-doubts mounted during the early preproduction stages of THE CHESS PLAYERS.

The answer -- as it emerged during months of shooting on location and in studios -- is woven into parallel stories of competition between lifelong friends and the British takeover of an outlying Indian province. Blended into the fabric are themes of loyalty, marital infidelity and humor.

Sustaining the large, professional case and crew throughout production was the remarkable intensity of Ray himself. This was to be the first time in his quarter-century career that he would not be working in his native language of Bengal. Although off-camera discussions and directions flowed in English and Bengali, the soundtrack is in Hindi (India's most widely spoken language) and English.

Indeed, since the film concentrates in part on British colonialism in India, nearly one-third of the dialogues are in English.

Among the handpicked, elaborate cast director Ray selected for THE CHESS PLAYERS, perhaps none is more widely recognized than Sir Richard Attenborough. During his 30-year career, Attenborough has portrayed cowards and lords and fantasy characters, in films ranging from IN WHICH WE SERVE to I'M ALL RIGHT, JACK to THE SAND PEBBLES to DR. DOOLITTLE. He has also directed motion pictures, (his latest being A BRIDGE TO FAR) which makes him particularly qualified to comment on the technique of his latest director, Satyajit Ray.

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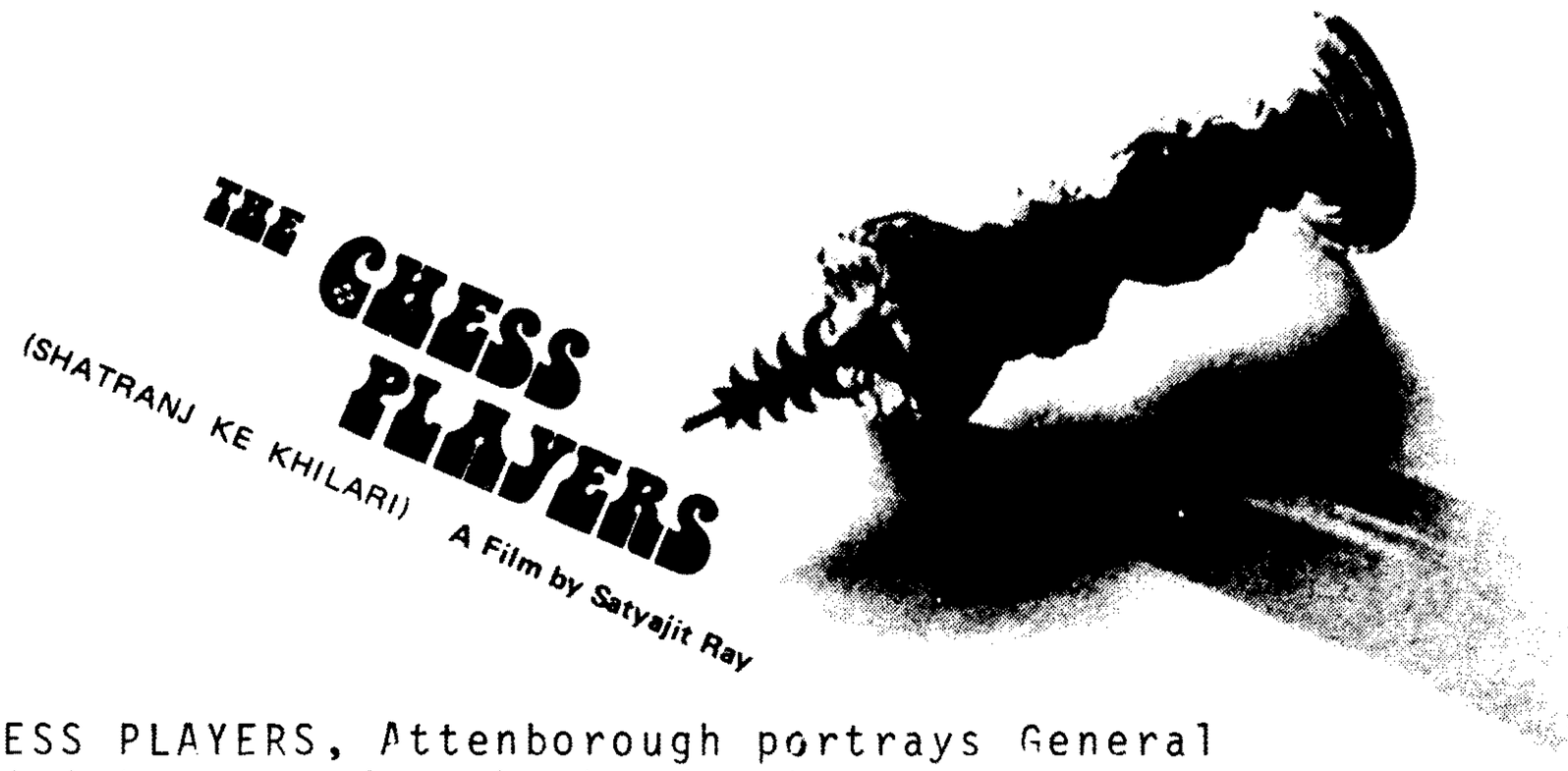

In THE CHESS PLAYERS, Attenborough portrays General Outram, the British commander who heads the effort to overpower an outlying Indian province.

Of his work with Satyajit Pay, Attenborough makes no effort to conceal his deepest regard. When Ray offered the role, Attenborough accepted without caring to know much about the story or the script.

"When someone of genius asks you to do it, you don't just have a cup of coffee and consider it," Attenborough says. "You just accept."

Saeed Jaffrey, who portrays the Mir in THE CHESS PLAYEPS, is best remembered by American audiences for his performance as Billy Fish, the ebullient Gurkha companion of Sean Connery and Michael Caine in THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING. The Gurkha role would have gone to Cantinflas if director John Juston could have filmed the story when he originally wanted, in the 1950s. Jaffrey -- who immensely enjoyed working with Huston -- nonetheless, is overwhelmed at working with Ray. "Huston one looked upon as a guru, an older man," Jaffrey said, "Ray is a guru, too, but he is also a friend. The relationship is closer." Jaffrey couldn't help encountering Ray's prolificity to the extent that it becomes "almost frightening."

During the filming of THE CHESS PLAYERS, Satyajit Ray took the crew on location during a major Indian holiday. Hundreds of holiday-makers spotted the unusual flurry of activity around a magnificant banyan tree which Ray has selected for the shooting, and they swarmed around the crew and cast, concentrating their attention on one of India's leading male stars, Sanjeev Kumar, who plays the role of Mirza in the film. After a makeshift cardon line was established and the crew got back to work, some prankster brought a terrified cow to the set and it ran helter-skelter amdist the equipment. Despite the pandemonium, Ray got his takes.

Ray's concern with his actors is almost legendary. On location for THE CHESS PLAYERS that concern was evidenced in

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many ways, perhaps most notably in the method by which Pay directed a boy he discovered on location in Lucknow. Pay handled the adolescent in the same manner he had directed the film's stars. In on scene, bending down to the boy's height, Ray explained the sequence and was positively gleeful when the novice turned in an unexpectedly natural performance.

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BIOGRAPHY OF SATYAJIT RAY

Satyajit Ray, India's most celebrated filmmaker, has helped create an international awareness of the world's most prolific motion picture industry. He has done this despite the fact that his films are hardly typical of the Indian cinema. All of Ray's 21 earlier feature films and four documentaries were shot in Ray's native Bengali language. THE CHESS PLAYERS is his first film in Hindi, India's most widely-spoken language.

Like Ingmar Bergman, Ray knew as a child that he wanted to become a film director. He was born in Calcutta in 1921, the son of a well-known writer and painter. He developed a great taste for American popular music and Western classical music during the 1930s, but turned his academic efforts toward degrees in economics and graphic arts. Ray worked as a commercial artist for a British advertising agency in India during the 1940s and when the agency sent him to London for a six-month training period in 1950, the would-be ad man became a consummate moviegoer. He saw 99 films during that stint in London, and returned to India to concentrate on filmmaking.

Ray is a filmmaker of many talents, as witnessed by his credits in THE CHESS PLAYERS as director, screenwriter and composer. These skills emerged as he entered the film industry in 1950. Between 1952 and 1955 he made PATHER PANCHALI (The Song of The Road), which received enormous international acclaim. When it was shown at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival, Arturo Lanocito, the world-renowned Italian critic, wrote that on seeing it he realized that "the magic horse of poetry" was invading the screen.

Ray's famous Aptu Trilogy collected a record number of international awards, perhaps more than any director has received for three films collectively. His films have been widely shown outside of India, receiving both critical and popular endorsements. For his filmmaking career, Ray has received international awards at many festivals worldwide, and India has awarded Ray the three civic honors.

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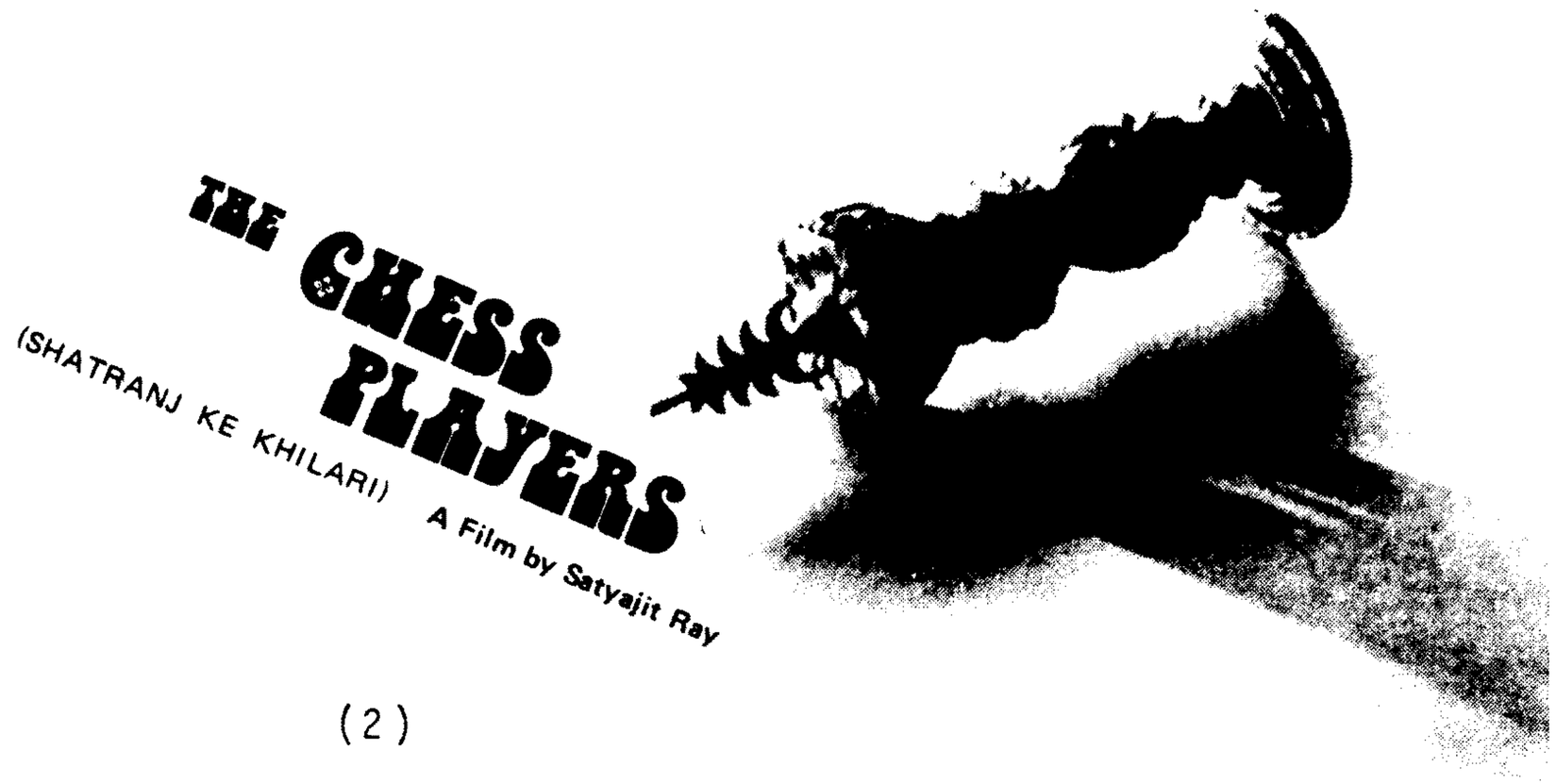

During his quarter-century film career, Ray has written many stories and continues to edit a children's magazine "Sandesh." Ray recently published a book, "Our Films, Their Films," a collection of 25 essays about filmmaking in India and overseas.

In his filmmaking, Ray admits being "more intuitive than analytical." His technique of timing comes from the nature of people and their environments. His camera is an intent but unobtrusive observer of reactions. His editing is the discreet, economical transition from one value to the next. In his camera composition is the trained eye of the graphic artist, in his sound track, the ear of the composer.

Ray believes that "art wedded to truth must in the end have its reward." Perhaps it's no coincidence, then, that the name Satyajit itself means "Triumph of Truth."

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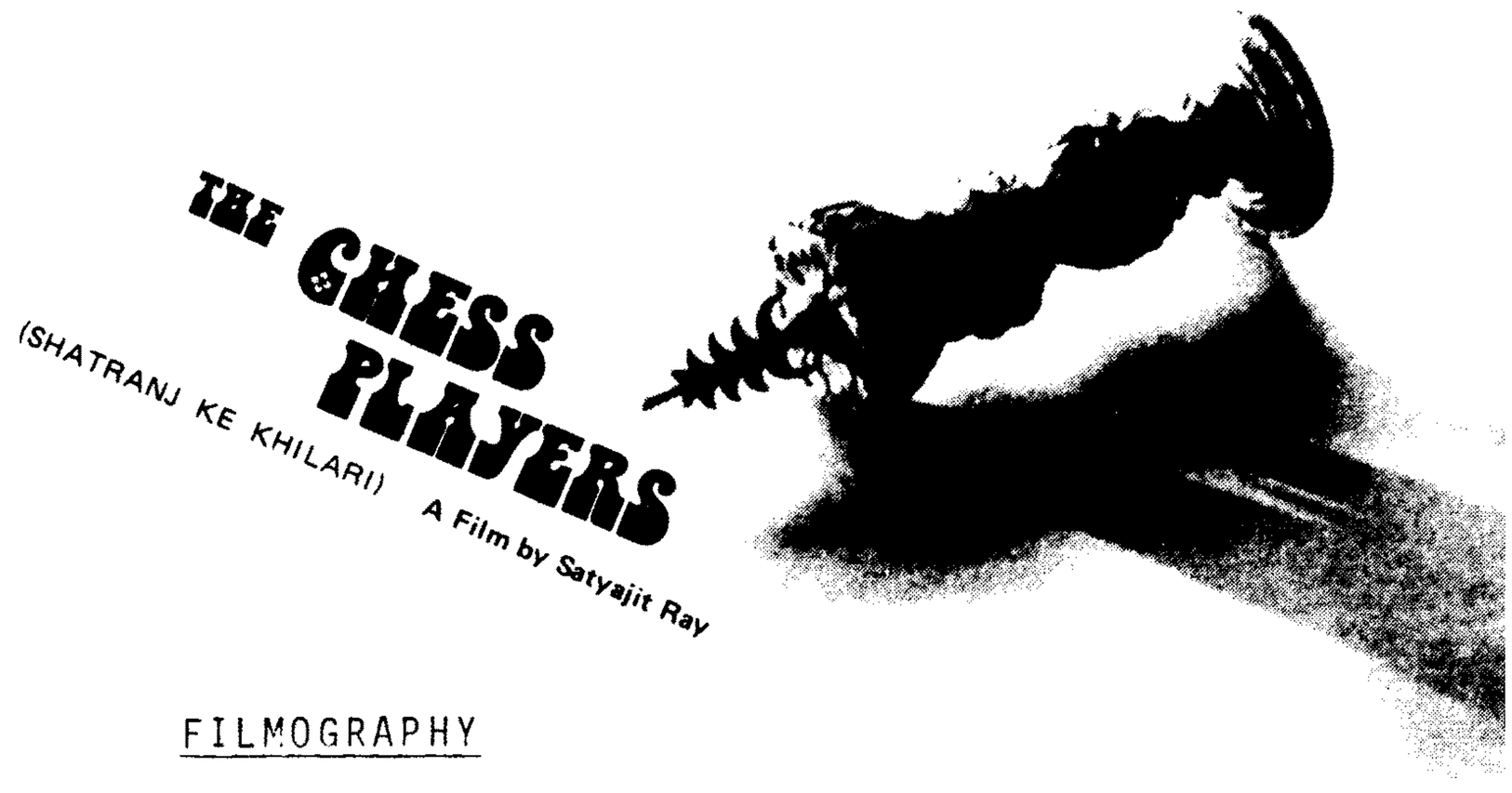

FILMOGRAPHY

Films of Ray

1952-55	Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road)
1956	Aparajito (The Unvanquished)
1957	Paras Pathar (The Touchstone)
1958	Jalsaghar (The Music Room)
1959	Apur Sansar (The World of Apu)
1960	Devi (The Goddess)
1961	Teen Kanya (Three Daughters)
1962	Abhijan (The Adventure)
1962	Kanchanjunga
1963	Mahanagar (The Big City)
1964	Charulata
1965	Kapurush -O- Mahapurush (The Coward and the Holy Man)
1966	Nayak (The Hero)
1967	Chiriakhana (The Zoo)
1968-69	Goopi Gyne Bagha Byne (The Adventure of Goopi and Bagha)
1969-70	Aranyer Din Ratri (Days and Nights in the Forest)
1970	Pratidwandi (The Adversary)
1971	Seema Baddha (Company Limited)
1973	Ashani Sanket (Distant Thunder)
1974	Sonar Kella (The Golden Fortress)
1975	Jan Aranya (The Middleman)
1976-77	Shatranj Ke Khilari (The Chess Players)

Documentaries (with English Commentaries by Ray)

1961	Rabindranath Tagore
1971	Sikkim
1972	The Inner Eye
1976	Balasaraswarati

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BIOGRAPHIES

SIR RICHARD ATTENBOROUGH (General Outram)

During a career spanning nearly 30 years, Richard Attenborough has distinguished himself on stage and in films as both a performer and director. Born in 1923, he began his stage career in England with an appearance in "Ah Wilderness" and made his first film in 1942 as a cowardly sailor in IN WHICH WE SERVE. His film credits include such acclaimed films as I'M ALL RIGHT, JACK, THE GREAT ESCAPE, SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON (which he also produced), DR. DOLITTLE, THE SAND PEBBLES, the 1969 version of DAVID COPPERFIELD. For his performance in SEANCE ON A WET AFTERNOON, he received Best Actor awards from the San Sebastian Film Festival and the British Film Academy.

Attenborough directed the current film epic A BRIDGE TOO FAR. His other directing credits include YOUNG WINSTON. Attenborough was knighted by Queen Elizabeth in 1976.

SAEED JAFFREY (MIR)

American audiences probably recall Saeed best from his ebullient performance as Billy Fish, the Gurkha companion to Sean Connery and Michael Caine in John Huston's film THE MAN WHO WOULD BE KING. Jaffrey, a native of India residing in England, has performed extensively in Shakespearean plays and appeared in such films as SHAKESPEARWALLA and THE HOUSEHOLDERS. Mimicry is one of Jaffrey's many abilities and during the shooting of THE CHESS PLAYERS, he amused his colleagues with his voice impressions of Julie Harris, Ravi Shankar and Michael Caine. Of his work with Ray in THE CHESS PLAYERS, Jaffrey will simply say it's his greatest film experience. "He's a perfect actor's director."

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SANJEEV KUMAR (MIRZA)

Considered the best actor on the Indian screen, Sanjeev has won all the major acting awards several times in India. Sanjeev claims that the most memorable day of his life was when he received a call from Ray asking him to perform in THE CHESS PLAYERS. At present Sanjeev Kumar is one of the most prolific actors in India and has performed with excellence, a variety of challenging roles.

SHABANA AZMI (MIRZA's wife)

A graduate of Poona Film Institute and not yet 25 years old, Azmi is the daughter of the famous Indian poet Kaifi Azmi. She has a very casual and carefree life style among Indian Film stars and is considered one of the most promising newcomers in Indian cinema. Her impressive performance in ANKUR (The Seedling) has received much critical acclaim, for her sensitive portrayal in a difficult role.

AMZAD KHAN (NAWAB WAJID ALI SHAH)

Son of a great Indian charactor actor Jayant, Khan gave a towering performance in his first movie, SHOLEY, which is the larget grossing film in Indian film history. Satyajit Ray saw that film and Khan's role in it led directly to his appearance in THE CHESS PLAYERS.

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