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EYE ON ENGLAND
AMIT ROY

A man for all seasons

Rituparno Ghosh is much taken with the autumn leaves, rust, gold, brown and yellow, blowing in the wind. "I wish I could have shot just the picnic scene in Chokher Bali in Britain," he says wistfully. "As I came past Buckingham Palace, I saw the leaves fluttering down from the trees. It was so beautiful."

Rituparno, clearly one of the most important directors to have emerged from India for some years, impressed audiences with two screenings of Chokher Bali at the London Film Festival. "I loved every moment of it," gushed a young Bengali woman, whose very positive reaction reflected one end of the spectrum.

At the other end, there were quibbles, obvious at the Q & A sessions at the end of the screenings. These ranged from "The cinematography is beautiful but..." to "I loved the first half, "I didn't understand the end," and "I am not Bengali and don't know how the film differs from Tagore's novel".

Rituparno is a thoughtful man, who respectfully treats each questioner as a serious student of cinema. Over dinner at Calcutta Notebook — the signboard at Britain's first genuine Bengali restaurant started by Udit Sarkhel is now up — and at the National Film Theatre (which permanently boasts a

blow-up from Satyajit Ray's Apur Sansar), Rituparno revealed future plans.

Just as with Chokher Bali, which evolved in his mind over many years, he has been mulling over the intriguing 1921 story of the Bengali zamindar, who apparently "returned from the dead" to reclaim his inheritance. His wife said he was an impostor, but his sisters swore he was their long-lost brother. The controversy divided India.

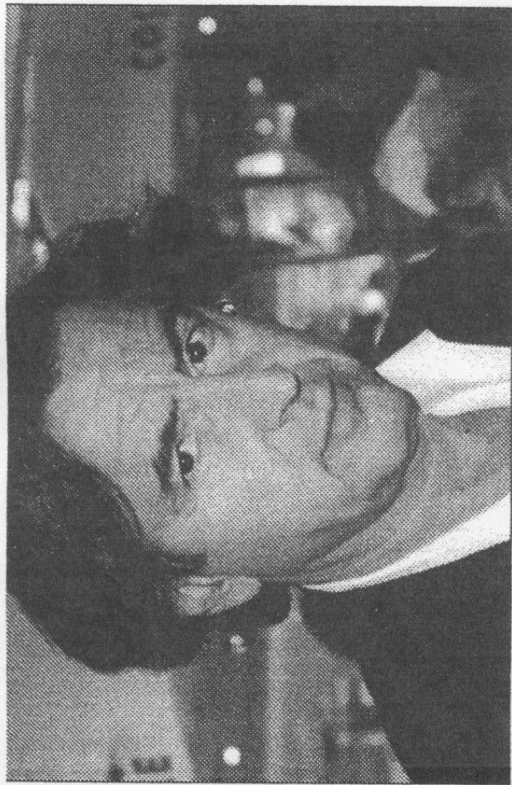
Rituparno said he had discussed his hopes with Partha Chatterjee, historian author of The Princely Imposter? The Kumar of Bhawal & the Secret History of Indian Nationalism (Permanent Black; Rs595). "I said, 'Will you give me the copyright?'" He said yes.

Rituparno added: "I asked Parthada, 'Should the same actor do both roles? Or do we find a lookalike?' To maintain the mystery is a cinematic challenge. It could be a profound film with a thriller plot."

At 41, Rituparno is moving into his prime. Aishwarya Rai and Ajay Devgan will be in his Hindi movie, Raincoat, for which he will work from Calcutta. He has also reached a tentative agreement with Amitabh Bachchan. "If I can make an international standard film in Calcutta, why should I move to Bombay? There is no need," he says.



IN HIS PRIME:
Rituparno Ghosh



JEKYLL AND HYDE: Bernard Levy's verdict on Pakistan

"There is a big degree of artificiality in the building of Pakistan," said Levy. "There is a crisis of identity in Pakistan. The best way to build up its identity is to build it against someone (meaning India)."

He went on: "There are two Pakistan. I know a lot of people in Pakistan, maybe the majority, who are true democrats, resisting silently the dictatorship of the military and the mullahs. The regime is a real problem, one of the most problematic in the world."

He believes that today "the real clash of civilisations is not between the West and the rest but inside the Islamic world. In Pakistan, the front line, between radicals and moderates, goes right to the top. It goes even inside the brain of Musharraf himself."

I told Levy that this Jekyll and Hyde depiction of Musharraf reminded me of Amitabh Bachchan's role in Aks. "Well," shrugged Levy, "Bollywood films are not always bad."

Eye-Spy

■ The updated book on spies and spying.



AGENTS AND WANNABES: (Left) Knightley's new book; (Right) Rami Ranger and Prem Sharma

several heads of the KGB, several chiefs of the British Intelligence Service, the Inspector General of the CIA, and the director of its anti-Soviet operations."

On just how much spying goes on between India and Pakistan, Phillip tells me: "An open democratic society like India is always at a disadvantage in the spy wars when up against a closed autocratic society like Pakistan. Pakistani intelligence officers can gain a great deal of information from published sources in India like newspapers and technical magazines. But what both sides want to know is intent." He adds: "What does India intend to do next? What does Pakistan intend to do next? For this you need a highly-placed political source. I've never seen any indication that either

peals to Indians."

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