

Silk sands and rivers: Gautam Ghose's intrepid quests.

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Film maker Gautam Ghose of the 'Boatman of River Padma' fame is at the moment on his way to central Asia. His will be a four month long magical caravan tour along the silk and the jade routes straddling these deserts- terrains. His will also be a voyage with a camera and a research team attempting to explore into deep past the signs, symbols and sensibilities of its people and of the myriad silkmen and other voyagers---- some lost, some escaping the ravages of the sands and the sand storms, and whose collective experiences are possibly encrypted in these sands of land..

Romantic as it may sound, this is no ordinary expedition nor the first of its kind. In the October of '90, the Fulk al Salamah an Omanese royal navy vessel, launched itself from Venice carrying on board an international team of scholars from thirty different countries from around the world under a UNESCO banner. This was to cover a maritime route that had roughly taken Marco Polo from Italy to China and that also covers the famed silk-route stretching from the Xian in China to the Antioch in Syria. This expedition termed 'The integral study of the silk roads. The roads of dialogue ' is expected to carry out its inquiries for a period of seven long years (up to 1997).

For me this inquiry is not about the different silk and jade route expeditions being undertaken My own question stems from the fact that for over a decade now, Ghose has been engaged in making films that seem to be defined by one unifying thread - the river. One wishes to ask him, why the sands now? Where in past one has asked the following : why does the river draw him-----
----Moynadeep ?

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It is not rare for a -----colours. It might also be too simplistic to begin to group Ghose's styles in terms of a water period or a sand period as has been done with Picasso's paintings----- his blue

period. Nevertheless, the temptation to work along such formalistic divides persists.

At the end, the reason why one conjures up the revision of a dialogue with this film maker is because he seems so endearingly accessible at 'open jury' platforms (as was apparent, for example, at the Bombay International Film Festival / BIFF'94, held in Feb.) or elsewhere. Two things about Gautam Ghose are transparent ---- one,---- social fabric. *What is less transparent are perhaps the following : that in his movement over the years from making films that handled themes verging on unresolved crisis to films that now forefront the aesthetics of expressionism , whether Ghose has attempted what would collectively amount to a "rigorous critique of the violence, persecution----- in modern culture" as evident in Bergman's films, or whether Ghose relates to ----- art. What is also ---- (story-telling etc.)

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Ghose's direct responses to questions or his fairly unassuming approach to his accomplishment (visible in the manner in which he handled interviews last year after winning critical acclaims for his Padma Nodeer Maajhi at the London Film Festival); hides the strains of a hispanic stridency, the lineaments of which are written on his face. *Then there is ---- soul of cinema. And in no small measure, his autograph " may a thousand flowers blossom" betrays the leftist perspective of his personae.

With all this in the back ground, one should like to ask them just one more question ---- what will ----- questions . * But I said, he is gone off for a while.

Colonization of minds: Who controls our publishings ?

At the root of autonomous publishing lies " the right to inform and be informed, as well as the necessity for the creation of a more njustify balanced information system". For the decolonized countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, this declaration encrypted in the Lagos Plan of action (1984) found its echoes in our erstwhile Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's (1985) call for a new information order for the developing world, that would enable it to

set its own information agenda. More than half a decade away from these calls such an information order still remains something of a dream in this part of the world. Perhaps not in the immediate sense of being able to exercise one's freedom of speech - upto a certain level this stands in constitutional guarantee for some of us. But beyond a point for most and sooner or later for some, the spirit of this character inescapably begins to drift towards a insidious trap that is nothing but a certain form of colonization because such entrapment is shaped and controlled by forces that are external of Sovereign boundaries. These forces in today's context yield their clout through money, and the ones who have this money have the power to direct existing and new information channels with their preferred visions and motives. Consequently, how we are informed about the world and what the world gets to know about us become a function of who owns and promotes these channels of communications. A very important segment of this information network happens to be the publishing industry.

Historically, many of the large educational publishing houses in Britain or in Europe were established during colonial periods " according to Mathew Evans a prominent member of the British publishing peer (Faber and Faber , and others). This had resulted in the creation of a certain infrastructure network in the Third World colonised nations for receiving the books published by these houses. Along the way, while the colonisers retreated, these setups continued to flourish on colonised territory. Initially this was a natural fallout of the gap left by the absence of indigenous publishing setups, but eventually in the ensuing period the force of their economic clout enabled these publishing houses to reinforce themselves further to the unfortunate detriment in the development of local publishing possibilities. India remains one of those few fortunate countries in the developing world to possess a reasonably sized autonomous indigenous publishing set up, which by definition is an institution that is 'responsible to itself, and exercises complete freedom in the control of its policies, finances and management," according to a prominent publishing person from Africa, Henry Chakva of the Heinemann Educational Books (East Africa) located in Nairobi. This would logistically require such a set up to be located within

its given country, as well as owned and controlled by its own citizens. This, by implication, would also mean that we get to inform or be informed about ourselves and our institutions of socialization and acculturation the ways these really are and not the way others wish to view these. While we stake so this privilege for granted, good examples of how external factors have retained a stranglehold over the fundamental right of a people to represent and convey their thoughts and idioms in their own preferred ways without intercession or distortions, may be drawn from the publishing and distribution situation in Africa.

There are several aspects of similarities that draw us into close affinity with that continent. Both India (a subcontinent) and Africa are large in size- physically and for the most part demographically; both possess a linguistic diversity with awe-inspiring numbers that run into hundreds (of languages) and thousands (of dialects), not to mention the strong oral tradition that some pockets of India and most of Africa have still managed to retain as a matter of fact almost 600 and odd languages in Africa out of its 1200 are yet to be transcribed. Further both Africa and India possess relatively low literacy levels although one often tends to ignore the fairly high functional levels of literacy among its people. Both of us have endured long periods of enslavement under alien rules; both have today been reduced to economies that show (relatively) low per capita incomes and high dependence on external sources of borrowings. And very importantly both possess educational systems that are colonial carry-overs with their studied emphasis on "reading for achievement rather than for self-development and enjoyment" and yet, in spite of these similarities, Africa's banes continue to lie in its inability to control an important part of its destiny viz (a) the face/countenance that it would like to project to the outside world; and (ii) the information via education which is at the same time relevant up to date and culture specific, that it wishes to offer its people.

It is of much concern that the printed matters in Africa, consisting of creative writing, educational materials and other is for the most part, in the hands of an ownership that is located outside the continent, as well as some that is composed of

elements who are entirely alien to the social or the cultural experiences of Africa. Whatever publishing that is currently located within Africa is essentially represented by Africa branches of transnational publishing corporations, notable among these being the Oxford University Press, Longman, Heinemann, Macmillan, Evans, Thomas Nelson and Hachett.