

Eeny, Meeny, Miny, Mole

Sally Walker, THE ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY OF INDIA, JULY 15, 1990 , Part II of III

Following her encounter with the sleuths of the CIA, chronicled in the Weekly of July 16, 1989, Sally Walker, the spy from outer space, embarks on "Operation Infiltration". The target: Seeking and Asking Wing (SAW), the Indian espionage agency.

Will SAW see through her gameplan?

A few days back a couple of CIA agents had come to see me with some confusion about whose operative I was and am. They formerly thought I was just a crazy American who the paranoid sector of Indian society thought must be a CIA agent because I had been here so long. The CIA and the CBI also knew I couldn't really be a CIA agent because my behaviour in India went against every rule and norm and code of ethics of any respectable (or even disrespectful) spy.

To wit, I had got emotionally entangled with an Indian who wasn't quite divorced yet and we scandalized everyone by living openly together and conducting a social life as if we were normal. (That ended very unpeacefully, by the way, but certainly in my best interests - he married someone else). I had also started societies in India, two of them, to be exact and had even got government grants, one of them for a plain paper copier! I had also written many, many newspaper articles (about 250 at last count) mostly about zoo and wildlife affairs and policy and usually critical of the government. Spies usually try and keep a low profile. Anyone with any sense does in India whether they are a spy or not and my friends are always telling me this. And I do try - really.

However, when I failed to pay the insurance on my moped, year after year, all the officials who had thought I couldn't possibly be a spy, thought all of my bad behaviour was 'cover' to put people off the trail. I couldn't possibly be a spy; therefore I had to be. It was getting confusing.

So the CIA paid me a visit and we had a bit of a confrontation on this matter, of which I must say, I got the better of them, I had them crying in their buttermilk in the end. People like CIA agents are so rigid in their thinking that basically they are very easy to break - like glass, they are. All those guys in the military-industrial-police (MIP) establishment are like that. The real strength is in flexibility, isn't it?

Anyway, their visit gave me the idea of offering my services to the CBI. If everyone thought I was a CIA agent, but I couldn't be because I was too badly behaved, yet I was one because my unconventional behaviour was a good cover, then who would ever suspect me of being a CBI agent? I could rid the entire country of corruption and no one would even notice. It would be my good deed, not for the day, but for my life! I could be god's little lollipop creating trouble for trouble-makers, making life better for the good guys.

With this 'divine' plan in mind, then, I ran confidently over to our local CBI office in Coimbatore to apply for a job.

Normally, CBI agents won't be in their office. They will be out investigating people. I know this because they have investigated me on several occasions, some routine and some not so routine. Foreigners who register in a city are routinely investigated and although it upsets one's neighbours and landlord, it really is just a friendly investigation.

Although I have lived in India a very long time and have been investigated over and over again. I had never once met at CBI agent (that I knew about anyway). Either I was out of town when they came, or they didn't even ask for me. The only time one came when I was at home was a disaster. I thought he was paper salesman and asked him to come back later in a manner more suitable for a paper

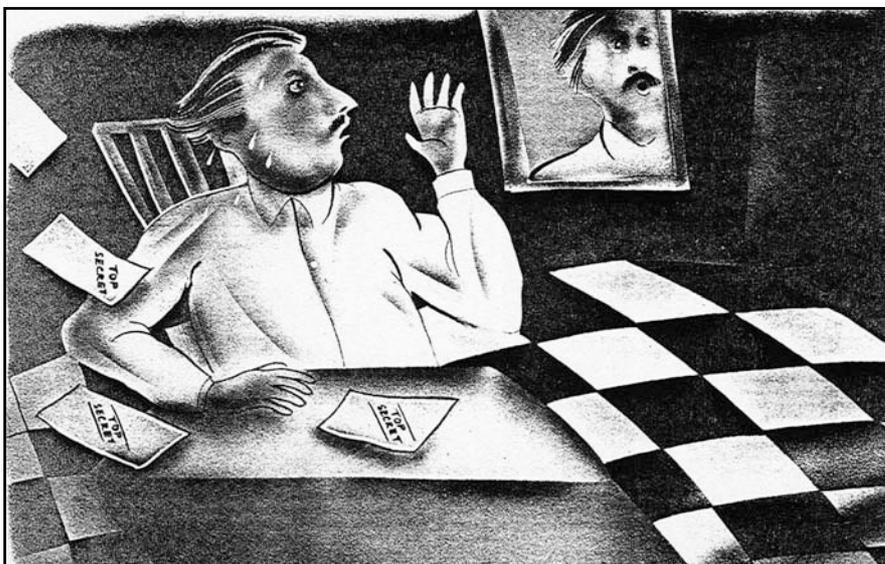
salesman than a CBI agent and he went off in a huff.

Anyway, when I entered the anteroom of the local CBI headquarters and asked the receptionist to see the in-charge, I really didn't know what kind of person to expect or even whether he would be in the office.

Now, I can understand that CBI agents don't get many foreigners coming to see them in their office. But really, when I stepped in the office, the receptionist looked at me like I was a tiger or lion coming through the door. I tried to put him at ease by approaching his desk a little slowly and with my hands up. This is what the police say in movies: "Get your hands up" when they deal with someone they think is dangerous, so I thought it would make him feel safe.

The only effect it seemed to have was to upset him however, because when I lowered my hands to take out my visiting card, he dived under his desk moaning piteously. I felt rather annoyed, actually, after trying to do the Right Thing and all, that he should act like that. Undaunted, I leaned over the desk and held my card in front of his face and said, "I want to meet your Sahib."

My visiting card is really very attractive. It looks like it was done by a upmarket commercial artist in Bombay or New York. It has a big three-colour logo on it saying ZOO in one inch black letters with a snappy





yellow cheetah striding across it. My organisation's name "Zoo Outreach Organisation" is written in bright red underneath and then my name and address. It really is rather striking. Why, then, this silly man looked at me the way he did, I can't figure.

He said "Zoo" firmly and peered up at me. Then, before I could react even with a nod or a smile he looked back down at the card again and said, "Zoo?"

This time when he looked up at me, I was ready. I smiled modestly in reply.

"Zoo," he said again and then (you won't believe this) he said : 'Who?... Zoo?' (It rhymes, you see! I wondered if he did it on purpose.)

I said : "Me... Zoo."

Then he said, pointing at me with the card : (I'll) bet you can guess this time:

"You... Zoo?"
"All riiiiigggggtttttt!" I exclaimed, clapping my hands, "You got it!"

By this time, the local CBI agent whose door was open, couldn't stand it another minute and came out himself to see what was going on.

The poor receptionist was still crouched under the desk with a death grip on my card, so I took out another and handed it over to the man I came to see with a smile. "Namaskara, Saar," I said. "May I take a few minutes of your time?"

The agent, a Singh by name didn't say anything, but he made a vague motion with his hand before turning back into his office which told me that I was welcome to come in. I went in and sat down. His office was no surprise. There was nothing in it. I mean, there was a desk and two or three chairs and a metal almirah and couple of paperweights, but there was nothing in the office to let one know that a human being occupied it. These MIPs are the same caste all the world over.

Singh looked me right in the eye and said absolutely nothing. The ball, obviously, was in my court.

"Saar," I said respectfully, "I have come to apply for a job with your agency".

Singh obviously was practiced in dealing with all types but nevertheless my request for a job threw him. His eyes betrayed him. They flickered. Then they blinked. Then they drew close together, following his eyebrows, and an unmistakable line of anxiety

appeared between them. I had definitely surprised him, no doubt about that.

He recovered nicely. "Ah," he said, "You want to apply for a job." It was not a question. He got it right away and he believed it. Or he knew that it was very important for him to pretend he believed it.

Compressing his lips and marshalling his inner strength, he uttered the question which Indians in authority have used from time immemorial to bludgeon unwanted elements into submission and discourage all progress. He said with the confidence and support of the whole of the World's Official Establishment (WOE) in any department behind him.

"What," he said smugly, "is your qualification?"

Now it was my turn to lose my cool. I just hhhhaattteee that... when a somebody asks for my qualification.

I said indignantly "What is my qualification? What is my Qualification? What is my Qualification? You're asking me what is my **Qualification**? Isn't the fact that I'm a foreigner and a lady and controversial figure in the wildlife movement and that I'm here in your office enough! I've come to help you, you fool!"

"Um" he said obviously straining to keep his wits in order. "How do you think you might be of service? Um, we have a receptionist. We have a typist too. And um, I'll have to check the rules, but I think being a foreigner disqualifies you from working in government service. Security, foreign exchange regulations, language problem... you know how it is..."

"Singh" I said, "I'm not interested in being a receptionist or a typist. I'm also not concerned, nor should you be, about the service rules. Singh", I said drawing myself up into the most dignified of postures, "I want to be a spy!"

"Ohhhh ho!" exclaimed Singh. "You want to be a spy. Well, well, well. That's different!" He looked at me with joy and relief.

I was pleased. He seemed to be taking my offer in a positive and constructive manner. But I was mistaken. His relief was not due to his satisfaction over getting a great new spy to help him. He was relieved because it was not really his department. He didn't have to deal with it. He didn't have to make a decision.

"Well, well, well", he said again, rubbing his hands together. "I'm afraid you're in the wrong office. The CBI doesn't have anything to do with foreign espionage. You want the Seeing and Asking Wing (SAW). You seeeee, SAW is India's intelligence agency, not CBI. CBI is like FBI in your country, you see."

I SAW. I mean, I Saw. I said "I See".

"No", he said "SAW! Seeing and Asking Wing ... it is the seaside to SAW spies.

"A spy for SAW" I mused aloud, feeling myself growing poetic. "She sees spies along the seashore for SAW," I continued, fascinated.

"Sally Spy sells secrets along the seaside to SAW spies", said Singh. He was also getting into it.

"Singh says SAW spies sell secrets in Syria", I exclaimed!

"How did you know that," Singh shouted, outraged! "You must already be a spy. I should have known better then to let you into my office. All you Americans are spies. It's true. I'm going to see SAW about Sally."

"Saar, don't see SAW! Not yet anyway. It was just an expression. I didn't know anything about your espionage activities in Syria. I mean, I didn't know until you said that. I mean I still don't know anything. Just tell me how to get to the SAW office and I'll go over there and see SAW myself. I'm sorry I bothered you. It's the first time I'm hearing of SAW".

Singh agreed – anything to get rid of me – and directed me to the SAW office. It was across the hall, it turned out. The receptionist had recovered by this time however, and made me sign my name in the register. Under purpose of visit, I hesitated, however. If I was to be good spy. I should be able to spy on everyone, including the receptionist, Therefore, no one (except Singh, of course) should know the reason I was going to the SAW office. I put "per" for personal and told the receptionist I was a neighbour".

A very nice Singh (not the same Singh as in the CBI) interviewed me. I decided to change my approach a bit. After all, spies are supposed to be subtle. I said (earnestly), "Singh, did you ever wonder why there are no spy novels about the espionage service in India?"

"Why, no," he said, bemused, "I never did wonder. I don't read the things

myself. Is it true? Care for tea?" he said in the same breath.

"Yes" I said positively, "to my knowledge there isn't a single spy novel having a setting in India much less, about Indian espionage agents. There are hundreds of novels about the CIA, the KGB, M15, the Mossad but there isn't single book about SAW. I didn't even know about SAW until recently. It's really too bad. It's not good for India's international image. People might think that you don't even have an espionage service. That's bad for security".

Singh laughed, "Not have spies in India? Ah Yo! We had spies before North America broke off from the North Pole. Palace espionage! We're the masters. We taught everybody else!"

"Maybe," I said, "but what does it matter when the world doesn't know. You need good spy fiction to complete your national personality".

"Well, maybe", Singh said. "But What's that got to do with you? Why are you here?" he asked rather anxiously, seemingly just now to comprehend the anomaly of an overweight and middle-aged foreign lady coming to visit him in his office.

"Singh", I said shyly, "I write". Then I blushed and went on, "I love India and I want to do something for my adopted country. I request you to hire me as a spy in SAW so that I can see what's happening and write novels and stories about it".

He looked fuddled, incapable of speech. So I continued: "You see, Singh, I have the perfect cover. I'm an American so everybody thinks I'm a CIA agent. However, I have behaved rather, uh, obtrusively in my years in India so I couldn't possibly be a spy since spies always behave unobtrusively and impeccably to keep up appearances and to maintain a low profile. However, it's so obvious that I'm not a spy, that I must be one. Only my doctor knows for sure. So who would ever suspect me of being an agent of SAW? See?"

"Not exactly", he said slowly, sliding sheets of Seeing and Asking Surveys along the sideboard. "But, by all means, do continue".

"Of course, my primary purpose is to assist you by creating a genre of spy fiction of India, but I could do a little real spying along the way too. I mean, I can't really get a true picture of SAW unless I see what SAW sees, isn't it? Besides I would like to do something to protect India from the forces of the

foreign hand as well as boosting her image”.

“Sure” he said thoughtfully, “I can see SAW with a sidekick like Sally Walker. But tell me, how did you all of a sudden get the idea to do this”.

“Well, a few days ago the CIA came to see me and...”

“What!” Singh exclaimed. “The CIA came to see you? Where? Here?”

“Why, yes” I said, puzzled, “they came to my office in Peelamedu. It was in the afternoon. I gave them some cold buttermilk.” I added eyeing Singh nervously. He seemed to be getting upset.

“Those creeps!” he cried. “Those bigots! Those liars. Those sneaky spies! They’re supposed to contact me whenever they come to town. They

can’t just go bothering our citizens like that. They’re supposed to register with us even for a short social call!”.

“Uh, Singh, ” I said, hoping to pacify him, “as much as I’d like to be, I’m not a citizen of India. I’m still an American and they came to see me. Of course, they did harass me a bit... but I suppose it doesn’t really count - and I definitely had the last word”.

“Of course it counts”, said Singh. “You may not be a pucca citizen, but if you’re living here, you’re our responsibility. We can’t let those goons go around harassing our visitors!”

Seeing my chance, I said : “Well, Singh, perhaps I could make myself doubly useful by informing you if I see these chaps again. I had the feeling they might come back”.

Singh went for it “ You’re hired!” he cried “Report tomorrow for training.

Nine o’ clock sharp. Wear old clothes. Tell your office you’re going out of station for two weeks. Welcome to SAW, Sally Walker,” he said saluting snappily.

And it was as simple as that. After only 15 years of living in India, enduring years of agonizing yoga lessons, tedious Sanskrit studies, a revolting romance with a horrid Indian male chauvinist pig, and an exhausting career taming tigers and changing baby chimpanzee nappies, finally, finally, I had achieved my goal. I had infiltrated the MIP establishment and had a foot in the door of the forest department too. It was just what my superiors had told me – slow and steady wins the race.

Tune in next month for the final installment of ... dum da dum dum ... the Spy from outer Sppppaaacccceeee!

