



Research Paper

Body politics in Spy fiction: an analysis of Calling Sehmat

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I. INTRODUCTION

The term “body politics” has assumed many theoretical as well as practical interpretations and associated meaning during the recent times. The term acquires a cardinal position in the discipline of English literary studies and criticism followed mainly due to the importance given to it by the feminist critics as they feel that the female body is not just as “natural” as mostly people assume but has deeper connotations. Following a general definition, body politics can be defined as the discursive practices that society or any institution for that matter controls and regulates human body and how it exerts a social control by the means of body. It is generally termed as a power play of institutionalized powers like that of governmental authority, law, the power that patronizes economic production and thereby controls the society and the lives of the people directly or indirectly or even a very personal intimate relationship that gives dominance to one and a submissive tendency to the other. Many works of art has fictionalized the concept of body politics as it is an issue that has not been resolved till yet because of the power hierarchy that exists in the world due to obvious reasons. The spy thriller is such a genre in which female bodies are used very extensively in order to hype the image of the main hero or the man who does all the actions. The very famous James Bond series is a typical example for this kind of a politics in cinematography using the aid of the submissive tempting female bodies. Another type is those in which the fictionalized characters themselves use their body at various instances as a cover up for survival. To the second category belongs the spy thriller fiction *Calling Sehmat* by Harindar S. Sikka, who is an ex-army man and has a lot of direct and indirect experiences of to the world of spies who have been used by Indian Intelligence Bureau in order to get a track of the dangerous plans prepared by the age old enemy nation-Pakistan. This spy thriller novel is based on real life incidents and this is the debut novel of the author who has contemplated about this novel and its narrative form many years. This novel has been adapted into a film named *Raazi*

The plot mainly revolves around the character Sehmat whose family has a legacy of transferring classified information from Pakistan to Indian army in order to save the nation. When Sehmat’s father is detected of lung cancer he becomes aware of the fact that he would live up to some more months during which there are high risks for Pakistan to plan something very terrible against India. He brings home his daughter studying in a university to take over his place. And Sehmat, who is very much devoted to her father and has pride on her family legacy takes up the challenge, without much thinking. Here the important thing is that Hudayat Khan has a perfect plan. He wants his daughter to get married to Iqbal Syed, Brigadier Syed’s younger son, who trusts Hudayat Khan as an informer and as a friend. So basically Hudayat trusts the female body aspect more than the spy instinct in Sehmat. The word Sehmat means agreeable, and that is quite evident in the character of Sehmat who first agrees with her own father’s decision and then does everything according to the instructions of Khalid Mir, her guide from the Intelligence bureau. Hudayat Khan knows that the only way through which Sehmat can be introduced to Syed is by a marital relationship with the family. He never thought of the way by which she can be introduced as his daughter and a substitute for him because he knows that Brigadier Syed is never going to believe in the caliber and credibility of a female spy. Here Sehmat is introduced as a shy and meek girl who loves and adores her new family in Pakistan. She is shown to be trying to placate her family members and portray the picture of a typical daughter-in-law. And it shows that Hudayat Khan’s plan is accurate to the extent that the family does not doubt Sehmat who is a spy in the guise of a newly added family member. At another instance, Sehmat herself uses her own body as an escape measure. When Iqbal Syed enters into room all of a sudden Sehmat, distracts him from her transmission devices, by removing her dress purposefully and at the same acting like an innocent. Iqbal Syed is another character, who respects women and at the same time, from the beginning itself, shows an aversion from the body of others unless they give him the consent. Here Sehmat does not want her mission to get interrupted and at the same times falls in

love with her husband, not imagining that her own presence will put him in danger later on. Sehmat is the one who initiate a physical relationship with Iqbal and here also she has used her body as a tool or as aid to get the trust and thereby access to places from she can extract information for the Intelligence bureau. While the family legacy and the craving to make her father proud, leads Sehmat to be in her mission, the intelligence bureau members does not see Sehmat as someone who serves them, but as a body they have put in order to get the desired result. This is very much evident when Khalid Mir has planned both Plan A and Plan B for Sehmat's rescue. When he finds that she has been followed by Iqbal Syed and his troop, he immediately drops the plan and tries to kill both of them, because they cannot rescue Sehmat and at the same time cannot afford to let her under the control of Pakistan army as she knows too much about the safety and security lines of the bureau. So their aim is to transfer a body to Pakistan and get the result or otherwise they eliminate the body for the sake of their own protection and they give a tag line that it is for the protection of the nation. Here at the last stage Sehmat loses everything she has. She loses her father, her family in Pakistan and her beloved husband who she did not imagine to get killed. And as a last resort, or as atonement, she decides to keep the baby of Iqbal in her womb and rescue herself from the Intelligence bureau

Here the thing that is very obvious is how body, especially a female body is used to politicize and gain politically. A nation wants secret of another nation and they just use a female body under the guise of patriotism to get what they need. Especially in spy fiction, the continuing body politics of female body is a topic that needs more attention.

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