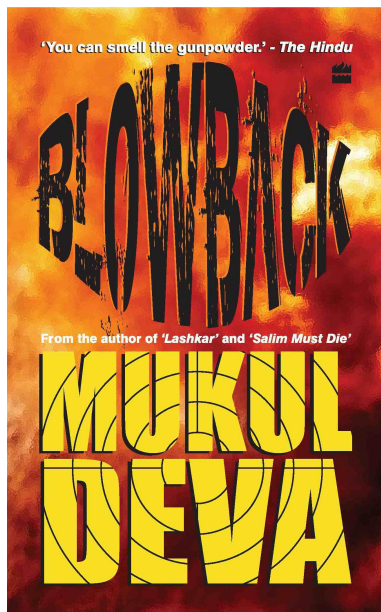


## Making sense of terror

*The third part of Mukul Deva's series touches on real time references to the present state of violence.*



Different people vent their frustrations in different ways. Mukul Deva's characters do it by shooting each other dead; the man himself lets his writing about such mindless killing serve as an emotional outlet.

The third installment of Deva's four-part series, *Blowback* gives you that feeling throughout — of an army man's deep-seated dissatisfaction with internal security in India. It reflects the military's anger of political inaction, or worse, vote-bank favouritism. Even as he refers extensively to real terrorist threats, Deva offers multi-pronged, absolutely workable solutions to solving our security issues.

### Plot

*Blowback* picks up from where *Salim Must Die* trailed off. Iqbal Khan, the ex-LeT militant-turned Indian elite security squad, Force 22 operative-turned-mole in the Indian Mujahideen is now working to uncover the organisation's clandestine operations in order to eliminate it, once and for all. As he lives the lie of a Muslim fundamentalist to gain acceptance into the homegrown terrorist group's fold, he slowly but surely sabotages their attempts to bomb cities across the landscape of India.

If *Salim...* dealt with closet Islamic hardliners coming into the open, *Blowback* gives the now real picture of a growing terror

faction which is becoming increasingly confident and frighteningly lethal. Deva foresees the convergence of all the fragmented terror groups under a unified banner and an all-powerful leader. There are several allusions to actual events, people and organisations throughout the book, with no effort made to mask even the most obvious similarities. For instance, the real-life SIMI is here the Youth for Purity in Society (YPS), a lawful front for an undercover Indian terrorist organisation.

Mumbai and Kasab are also featured, as are the increasing Talibanisation of Pakistan and its puppet civilian government, the new American heads of state, and even a hilariously demeaning reference to our ex-Home Minister.

The problem with Deva is his characterisation; it's firmly set in black or white with hardly any scope for layering. Also, his explanations of character motives are always too complete, leaving little for the imagination to discover. Suspense — the heart of all good fiction — is lost. The writing fluctuates a lot too; it's great in some parts but in some others, reads like a school English essay with way too many idioms thrown in.

### Prophetic references

The genre being thriller, the plot could definitely do with more convolutions and red herrings. Nevertheless, it's got enough action to make it a riveting read. *Blowback* picks up pace towards the middle, and draws you into the mind games that dictate the war for and against jihad. When the modus operandi of the terrorists is intricately explained, you know that Deva is on familiar ground. The book also gets unnervingly prophetic as there are repeated references to the German Bakery in Pune and I was reading this the same time as the blasts took place!

As the story draws to its tragic close, Deva handles it with the right amount of sentiment. The heartbreaking end is so well written you can almost forgive him for the botched up emotional overdrive in the earlier parts.

Deva's trilogy is a must read for anyone who wants to make sense of the world's newly acquired thirst for blood. As he draws parallels with real events and intersperses a lot of fact with a little fiction, he paints the picture of geo-politics and terrorism with fantastic clarity. Besides, he's one of India's few thriller writers, let alone military thriller. Read him, if not for anything else, just to taste the genre.

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