

HOW DOES TERRORISM EMERGE?

Deva's thriller answers this and several other questions in an unusually realistic manner



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READ

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Blowback

By Mukul Deva, published by HarperCollins

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★★★★½

I had avoided Mukul Deva's first two books, assuming they would have too much *dishoom-dishoom* for my sensitivities. But when a friend mentioned that he was reading *Blowback* and

that it was "just superb", I hesitatingly picked up *Salim Must Die* and the next thing I knew was I'd turned the last page and was thinking, "I have to go buy the new one."

In December 1981,

Mukul Deva was commissioned into the Sikh Light Infantry of the Indian Army and retired after 15 years of service which included a decade of active combat duty in India and overseas, to become India's first military action thriller writer. His books are set in the background of our military environment. The descriptions are vivid, the plots racy and the detail very convincingly developed. I was particularly struck by the depth of realistic portrayal. How does terrorism emerge? What is the thought process of the ones who mastermind, and on what weaknesses

do they prey to seduce vulnerable youngsters to their cause? The religious and emotional background, the essentials of recruitment, training and indoctrination, the logistics of transportation, the chemistry and physics of a bomb as described here are convincing and impressive.

Most spectacular of all, *Blowback*, which has Pune as a key location, was released literally days before the Pune German Bakery bomb blast.

I mailed Mukul Deva to ask him why he'd picked Pune for this book and he replied, "Several reasons. Having spent some of the best years of my life there, I love it. With the large concentration of high (psychological and propaganda) value targets and foreigners, it was just the right target for the terrorists. Things became



logically synchronised (from the Pak-LeT point of view) when certain divisive and short-sighted politicians started playing regional politics. What better conditions can we give them on a platter? As things

panned out I was not too far from reality — unfortunately.

"If you look back all the way to 1988 you will see that every single tumultuous political, communal and economic incident has been exploited by the ISI to add to the troubles India faces. Am I being simplistic? I leave it to you to look back and judge."

He also mentioned that he is committed to writing a book a year and each would be differently formatted, even visually, and that the stories would cover different aspects of terrorism.

I found the two books different from each other, though some characters

reappear. Terrorism is a background reality that has come to reduce our quality of life in some areas and we might as well make the most of it by enjoying Mukul Deva's annual releases on the theme.

What did upset me a little was the language: these books have more clichés, old-fashioned and sometimes incongruous expressions than I would use. So I spent a little time explaining patiently to myself that it did quite accurately mirror the spoken and written language used by officers of the Indian Army, and that a lot of well-educated people in the corporate world too would find themselves comfortable in this, um, "milieu", and that if the English language could be tolerant and accepting of different cultures and usage by different communities, then I could too.