

SPOTLIGHT

Blowback
By Mukul Deva
Harper Collins India
Rs 299/-

Behind the blasts

Mukul Deva still has no rivals in the Indian political thriller field ... A review by anjana basu

WITH every book that he writes, this Indian Tom Clancy seems to be going from strength to strength. *Blowback* continues the adventures of Iqbal whom Mukul Deva readers will remember meeting in *Lashkar* and *Salim Must Die*. Iqbal has progressed from being a *jibad* follower to a staunch anti-jihadist, moved by his mother's death in a bomb blast. *Blowback* opens with Iqbal and Tehnaz stranded on the wrong side of the border. Iqbal is wounded and Tehnaz, a member of the Indian counter terrorist Force 22, chooses to try to get him medical attention in the Thar Desert, feeling that it would save valuable time. Because the outcome can never be predicted in dangerous terrain, the plan goes wrong and the pair is forced to retreat to the border again. 'Damn! That was close... The thought was still forming in his mind when the second rifle bullet sliced through the already shattered windscreen and slammed into Iqbal.'

In the meantime, a warlord from the hilly tribal areas of Pakistan has risen to the crest of the *jibadi* wave, trying to join all the terror groups to take on the Americans. One of his allies seems to belong to the Pakistani ISI. The question is, who is working with whom and why? Tehnaz and Iqbal, back on the right

side of the border, newly married and newly pregnant, join hands to defeat this plot. And then the game of danger and double dealing begins. And the reader is hooked by this raciness.

Apart from Pune, *Blowback* covers Varanasi, Surat and Jaipur, the cities which had bomb blasts and several bombs that failed to explode as well - fact that is key to *Blowback*.

The book was certainly written long before the Pune blasts, but with his customary prescience, Deva chooses Pune as the background for much of the action of the book. This says a great deal for the research that he puts into each book. Of course, Deva has the advantage of being a retired Indian Army officer which gives him certain insights into the nature of violence and which is also why he prefers to have a special commando unit working on the heroics.

Compare him to Ludlum or Frederick Forsyth and you may find the plots a trifle simplistic, but Deva is trying to cover ground which he failed to in his earlier books. *Blowback*, for once, has a fleshed out woman

character and a love story at its core, which may be an answer to those who felt he ignored women for the most part. The reader is involved with Tehnaz and Iqbal and what will happen to them, much more so than in the earlier books. However, the rest of the characters still need to be fleshed out because the good stay pleasantly good and bad nastily bad without too many undercurrents.

That said, Mukul Deva still has no rivals in the Indian political thriller field and those tired of wondering what happened why and who did it in the weariness world of real politics will be able to curl up with *Blowback* and feel briefly on top of the situation.

The reviewer is a freelance contributor

