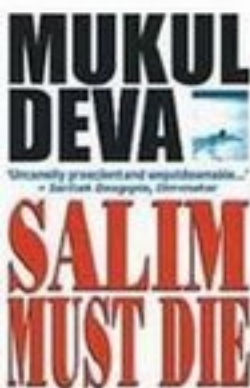


# Bordering reality & fiction



SALIM MUST DIE  
Mukul Deva  
HarperCollins,  
2009, pp 415, Rs 225

He had done a marvellous job with his *Lashkar* and now suspense author Mukul Deva gives us another insightful view into the threat perception of Islamic fundamentalism. *Salim Must Die* is a sequel to his bestseller *Lashkar* and it continues to feature Deva's main characters Iqbal, Anbu and Salim — much more in detail.

*Lashkar* ended but a new plot comes from Iqbal, the mechanic-turned terrorist who made his way back across the Line of Control (LoC) to be captured by the Indian armed forces. Why would he do that and what is the mission of this young man is an-

swered in the most thrilling manner. The plot revolves around the supposed-to-be-dead Murad Salim, a ruthless and brilliant architect of global terror network. Now he is bent on carrying out his most deadly plan to tell the rest of the world that he stands on the ground of righteousness.

*Salim Must Die* crosses a number of international boundaries with a mischievous plot for world domination. It also involves detailed military intelligence tactics and operations. And it is now up to Colonel Ambu and his Force 22, the elite national security team, to save not only India but the world. The plot and sub-plots of *Salim Must Die* are engrossing and remain promising to the last page.

Deva's characters are scary and some times too real. They give goose bumps and dry throats every now and then. This is because his subject remains basically contemporary, wherein terrorists can strike almost anywhere at anytime. The subject is more alive because of the recent terror strikes in Mumbai and across major cities. Reading deep into the settings can sometimes blur your sense of reality and fiction.

The main characters in the story are also given certain traits and characters which are strikingly similar to the situations on the

terror front. One of the most notable feature about *Salim Must Die* is the amount and quality of research Deva had undertaken on each of the things he mentions — weapons, security system and so forth. He seems to know the inside-out of the defence establishment and also the entire defence setup. His military experience clearly have a telling on his works and presentation skills. He is descriptive, yet sharp and to the point.

However, Deva's open acknowledgement that suspense needs to move fast and only in one direction, leaves him little time for the human aspect of his characters. It looks as if all of them are born solely to do the specific task assigned to them. It would have been a full exercise had he thrown light on the 'other' lives of the men who are hell-bent on fulfilling their missions.

There are also some needless editing errors which a keen reader could easily spot.

Otherwise, Deva is an equal with the likes of Robert Ludlum and Sidney Sheldon when it comes to telling suspense stories. And his *Salim Must Die* with its simple English and a tight plot, bound together by intricate but brilliant narration leaves the reader in awe.

Robert L Sungte