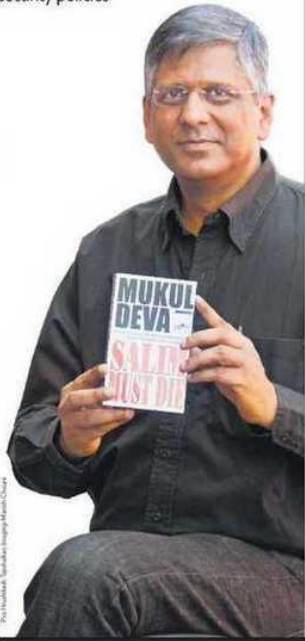


WORD WAR ON TERRORISM

Mukul Deva has turned his military service experiences into literary works. He spoke to Biswadip Mitra on topics ranging from Indian writing in English to our security policies



Terrorists, infiltrators and counter-insurgency operations were not a matter of imagination when India's "only military writer" Mukul Deva began writing about them. After being commissioned in the Sikh Light Infantry for over 15 years, Deva was part of the Indian Army operations across the country and overseas till his premature retirement as a Major in 1996. "All of those first-hand experiences, including the 10-years of counter-insurgency operations in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere," helped him to write several books like the semi-fictional thrillers *Lasbkar* and the recently-published *Salm Must Die*. "Authenticity isn't an issue for my works," Deva, who graduated from the National Defence Academy, Pune, and the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, says.

Having written several books, including those on management and women in Indian cinema, Deva turned to thrillers. "I was outraged by the Sarojini Nagar bombing in Delhi in 2005 and decided to write about terrorism and the lack of political will to tackle the menace," the writer says about the catalyst behind his first thriller. "I felt that something logical must be done and I wanted the people to know the real thing that is going around us," he adds.

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Such a serious issue could have been presented either as a typical non-fiction book on security policies and military strategies or as a fiction. I ask him about his choice. "I chose the format of military-fiction," Deva informs. "But, as I said earlier, the thrillers are loaded with experience and research into terrorism and military

operations of India and those by Pakistan. These facts are seamlessly intertwined with the fiction. You cannot differentiate reality," he adds with a smile. Though he immensely enjoys writing thrillers, it isn't an easy task. "*Salm Must Die* is spread across 10 time zones, I had to manage the plots accordingly and had to maintain them on a spreadsheet to avoid any discrepancy," Deva says.

Saviour force
Salm Must Die is the second part in the *Lasbkar* series. The well-received thrillers revolve around the terrorists who operate against India — within and without — at the behest of Pakistani establishments and the fanatics there. In the recent work, Murad Salm, an ex-brigadier of Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence, plans to destabilise

India. Between his sinister plot and death of thousands of innocent people stands India's Force 22 commanded by Colonel Anbu. "In reality, we have an excellent Special Force that is used in extreme crisis. But, I cannot divulge the details," the writer says, leaving me more curious.

It leads me to ask about the possibility of breach of the Official Secrets Act or other laws. "No, I did not access any official document. Most of the information I have used is available in public domain and there is no violation of any law. So far as the strategically sensitive inputs are concerned, like the bomb-making process and other technical details, I have kept them vague so that no one can misuse the information," Deva claims, adding that we all need to be "socially responsible and accountable citizens." His days at the NDA, Pune, have made a man out of him, he fondly adds in this context.

Everyday conversations
The language of his chilling thrillers has been predominantly simple and conversational English. "We Indians speak in English that is simple with a mix of Indian words. I wanted to keep the dialogues as real as possible, so that the readers can relate

to it," Deva says when I refer to the rather absurd and artificial dialogues that I often find in the English language works of some of the recent Indian writers.

Getting back to Deva's works, I ask him about the writing regimen that he follows and the research he does for the thrillers. "These works are like movie scripts. I have the entire plot in my head like a film. All I do is write down those sequences. But before writing, I need to study all the aspects involved. Everyday I scan all the information for over two hours and this goes on for about seven months. After that I begin to write. That takes another seven to eight months," he informs.

And with each part of the series, the research gets more incisive, he adds. "I have two more parts for the *Lasbkar* series in my mind. The next part, called *Dust Will Never Settle*, is due in 2010," Deva affirms. "My endeavour has been to get inside the minds of those terrorists who violate human rights and kill without slightest remorse."

Talking about the situation in the Kashmir Valley, Deva says people there are peace-loving and secular. "But, it is the constant instigation from across the border that is making things difficult. India must take tough military action against the terrorists and their masters. New Delhi must stop thinking tactically when something happens. The government must think strategically."

And as Deva signs the copy of his latest thriller for me, he reminds us that terrorism has no religion. "We all are Indians, no matter what our faith may be and it is for us to stand united against these threats," he signs off with a message.

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Photo: Anand Kumar/Sakal Images/Mukul Deva