

Deva must write!

TABLE FOR TWO Mukul Deva can eat uncooked food but his stories are anything but raw



NO MILITARY DISCIPLINE HERE Author Mukul Deva relishing his food at Hyatt Regency's La Piazza restaurant PHOTO: ANU PUSHKARNA

I am equally happy eating at the dhaba across the road." Author Mukul Deva sounds like a thoroughbred army man though it has been a long time since he hung his gun to push the pen. Ensnared in a calm corner at La Piazza, the Italian restaurant of Hyatt Regency, which he remembers more for its bar than food, Deva declares, "I have no literary pretensions - after all I am just 10th pass - or the longing to move only in refined circles. As for food *main khane-peene wale logon main se hoon*. While others eat, I indulge in drinking," he quips.

But seriously, how is he churning out bestsellers with a military-like discipline? The readers of his military action thrillers had yet to recover from the stinging pace laced with spot on predictions of "Lashkar" and "Salim Must Die" that Deva is back with "Blowback".

"I am a storyteller and as long as there are people enjoying those stories I am happy. People have been asking me how I have been able to do it year after year. I have the plot of all the four books in my mind. As soon as I give the manuscript of one to the publisher, I start writing the next. I can say with surety that I will be back with the fourth called 'Tanzeem' by next January."

With health no longer permitting dalliance with hard drinks, Deva stirs fresh lime soda. He says "Blowback" has a more emotional layer-

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ing than his previous novels. "I write in a way that they work as stand alone novels but if one wants to experience the complete journey of the characters, it is better to read the previous two before moving to 'Blowback'."

Talking about his amazing ability to comprehend the impending events, Deva says the information is available in public domain. It is just that it is scattered. "We all know that cricket is the biggest religion in the subcontinent and it was a just a matter of time that a cricket team would be attacked. Similarly, the unmanned islands of Maldives were waiting to be tapped by terror groups."

Deva relates how often people hold him responsible for giving tips to terror groups through his books. "I contend the information is as much available to security agencies. It is just a matter of putting it together and drawing the right inferences. For instance, newspaper reports suggest that Pakistan got an aid of around 8.6 million dollars last year but it

doesn't reflect in the economic growth of the country. The inflation is skyrocketing, unemployment is on the rise and no new hospitals and schools have been built. So where did the money go?"

Raw food

After plenty of food for thought we ask the chef to take care of our mortal needs. Deva happens to be allergic to fish, he suggests tagliolini and capelellaci pasta. The former turns out to be spinach spaghetti with Sicilian pesto and almond flakes while the latter is navel-shaped broccoli stuffed pasta in light cheese sauce and served on the bed of herbs. As the Italian cuisine hooks our palette, Deva recalls the days of his commando training. "In one of the modules I was expected to survive three days in the jungle with a potato, an onion and a small quantity of rice. As I had never cooked in my life I didn't look for that option. I ate them raw - one each day."

His military training has made

him unfussy about the food. "I have a lead lining in my stomach! I can drink tap water while others might complain of gastroenteritis. When my children ask for Bislari on a dhaba, I laugh. I have never looked for options in food. I don't even remember what I had for my breakfast. If you ask me I would say give me anything hot. I can eat everything except fish, beef and pork."

Deva suggests compulsory military training for everybody. "If every citizen spends a year in the Army, the health bill of the country will come down. I maintained the same weight through twenty years of my service in the Defence forces. And when I put on weight after retirement, I returned to the same old methods to lose 12 kilos in a year."

As we dig deeper, the incidents start getting intriguing. "Once during a skirmish on the border, I along with my two companions decided to smoke. When two of us lit our cigarettes nothing happened but when the third one attempted, the sniper went through his head. I didn't smoke for the next three years." There is silence....

Deva is in no mood to sum up the proceedings with a dessert as he is looking for gur in an Italian setting! We settle for a cup of espresso.

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