

When truth trips!

BOOKMARK As "Salim Must Die" makes a splash, ANUJ KUMAR finds author Mukul Deva full of life

You can smell the gun powder. This is the impact of the words of Mukul Deva. They do take you on a flight of fiction but they take off from stripped reality. And that gory truth is terrorism. The country's first military thriller writer caught our attention with a hard hitting novel "Lashkar" last year. This time he promises to hit harder with "Salim Must Die" releasing this week. "In 'Lashkar' I tried to figure out why India is facing the terror threat. Here I have explored the anatomy of a terrorist and the geopolitics associated with it."

A professional weaving a tale around his vocation is a trend, which it seems, is here to stay. Mukul is no different. His profession was. An ex-Armyman, Mukul says he is filling a gap. "Military thriller is a fascinating genre and India has a rich military tradition. Still Indian readers have to turn to a Clancy or a Loodlum to whet their appetite. The latter is more about intelligence than military action."

Perhaps the words martial and literature don't match? "Not quite," Mukul grins. "I believe an army man's mental mobility is the highest." Referring to NSG commandoes involved in Operation Taj, Mukul says, "They had 30 seconds to decide whether the person hiding behind the wooden cabinet is a terrorist or a guest. It depends on where you translate it." He has carried three characters, Iqbal, Anbu and Salim forward to his new novel. So why should Salim die? "It is not about Salim the brigadier in the Pakistan army, who staged his death in 'Lashkar' only to resurface. It is about the breed, the thought, which should be exterminated."

"Lashkar" started from the Sarojini Nagar blasts of 2005 and at that time people, even the media was not ready to believe that there could be a local element involved as well. But Mukul's Iqbal was from Lucknow, an engineer who was brainwashed to become an extremist. "The recent encounters have made people mail me asking:



IN LOVE WITH THE GREENS! Mukul Deva in New Delhi PHOTO: RAJEEV BHATT

how did you know? I tell them go to the Net, check the website of 15 governments all over the world and you will get your answers. I have spent three years researching."

Spread over a dozen countries and involving high-tech warfare, "Salim Must Die" also predicts some dark days ahead, which Mukul prays should not come true. "The terrorist organisa-

tions are focussing on educated youth because they need men who can face the modern force. But at the core it is one of the three, which we are told to respect, is responsible - parents,

Chills and Thrills

Coinciding with the release of "Salim Must Die", HarperCollins Publishers India is conducting a month-long Chills and Thrills Festival '09. The festival will be packed with large doses of mystery, detective fiction, whodunits, crime and war thrillers. Readers can walk in their preferred bookstore and find their favourite author in the Chills and Thrills section. They can take with them memorabilia along with copies of their favourite author.

teacher religious guru."

Chaar dham!

Mukul has served in all the four insurgency prone regions - something he describes as completing *chaar dhams* - of the country, and is one those rare people who have seen Prabhakaran in person. "I feel our reaction to the Parliament attack was not appropriate. We should have taken the war to the enemy." He quotes Paul Wilkinson: "Fighting terrorism is like being a goalkeeper. You can make a hundred brilliant saves, but the only shot people remember is the one that gets past you." But in Malegaon we saw another face of an army man? "The case is sub-judice. If proven guilty they should also get the severest treatment. It is not that the entire force is being subverted. It is like if you have two bottles, one has mineral water and the other is full of mud. If you add a drop of mud to the mineral water, the entire bottle will get polluted but if you add a drop of mineral water to the mud, it won't make any difference."

Mukul is not over with terrorism yet. He is on a four-part series trip. "Two are out of my system." And yes, there is Bollywood calling as well. "I don't want J.P. Dutta to make it into a film. I am in talks with Govind Nihalani, Mani Shankar and a few more. Let's see."