

Of terrorism and its aftermath in society



NOVELIST Mukul Deva comes as a pleasant surprise. After all, these days, it is rare to find a successful, celebrated man who has enough vulnerability to allow all the emotion and outrage within to pour out, unstoppered.

After the bestseller *Lashkar*, which introduced the reader to the realities of terrorism in India, his sequel *Salim Must Die*, was released at the Crossword Bookstore in T Nagar last week. The book, published by HarperCollins, talks about terrorism, the geo-political and economic reasons behind it and how it affects the world.

"*Lashkar*, based on the Sarojini Nagar bomb blasts, highlighted the terrorist problem we face in India today. In the book, the blasts are engineered by this guy who is a brigadier from the ISI. It also highlights the character called Iqbal, a college student with a public school background, subverted by the Maulvis and Lashkar-e-Taliban and how the bomb blast master-minded by the group kills his mother and sister. Then he becomes anti-jihadi," says Mukul, about his previous book.

Salim must Die is about the besieged military dictator in Pakistan who clings to power in the face of increasing opposition. Then the two GED leaders unite to strike a secret deal. The prize: the most wanted man in the world. It is at this point that Salim, an old ISI hand and ex-Brigadier in the Pakistan army, comes in. Egged on by the rogue ISI leadership, he unleashes a reign of terror. Caught in the eye of the storm, the Indian prime minister turns yet again to Force 22, the secret Indian strike action group.

"The action is based in 11 time zones. That is why *Salim must Die* was far more difficult to construct than *Lashkar*. In *Lashkar*, we talk about just one time zone," says Mukul.

Ask him what makes him write extensively on this issue and he says, "The fact that our government fails to respond. Today Mumbai, tomorrow Kolkata, a day later Hyderabad and then Surat and

Ahmadabad... it just keeps on. And whatever I've written is historically correct. I've written fiction because it gives me the license to ask questions. When I write fiction, I can pretty much express myself. And I've given solutions that are really workable," says Mukul, adding "Our politicians don't need rocket science, they need political will. We need New Delhi to take a firm stand and tackle this issue."

Mukul also believes Pakistan could do much better for itself. "Do you know that after the earthquake, the Maulvis in Pakistan did not allow male volunteers to pull out women from the debris because they would have been defiled by their touch? They allowed them to die rather than pull them out," he points out.

However, he claims never to take a stand. "I'm just a profiler of times. Whatever happens around us, we write. Somebody has to do it, why not me?"

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