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Individual Response to Reality: Radicalism in the Lashkar Series of Mukul Deva



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Abstract

Contemporary reality is sketched from the imaginary strokes of the veteran in the Lashkar series. The novelist Mukul Deva, who has known the inside picture of the armed forces, has shown the effect of radicalism on the lives of civilians and personnel. The four novels penned and published each year from 2008 to 2011, *Lashkar*, *Salim Must Die*, *Blowback*, and *Tanzeem*, portray the inner realities of the borders, the role of national policies, and individual causes amplifying the threats of armed conflicts. When it is a matter of uniformed or organised opposition, we assume that the war will take place due to the collective cause and welfare motive intended. However, the protagonist, Iqbal, proves otherwise in all four sequels of *Lashkar*. As an ordinary boy from Lucknow, India, the turmoil and losses in his personal life led to his involvement in terror activities, and the related chain of events continued to catch the whole nation in a whirlwind of hate

and fear, leading to Iqbal's radical reaction to reality.

The militants, as well as the armed forces of the nations, take radical measures to curb the power and attain beneficiary ends. The unrelenting of violence and unrest to achieve peace is an irony of the situation. This paper studies the four novels as narratives of personal agony, losses and aspirations. The humane portrayal of the uniformed personnel is unique in all these novels. The militants of the opponent nation, like Brigadier Murad Salim, are assessed realistically.

This study also tries to analyse the words of the erstwhile American President Ronald Regan on how "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" concerning the actions in the select novels. The paper observes the intricacies among the world's terrorist organisations, the intelligence and armed forces of the nations, and the ignorant public, ironically, in the democratic setup.

Keywords

reality, conflicts, welfare, personal, public.

Research Paper

Indian Military Literature comprises fictional and non-fictional works by ex-military personnel and other writers who are related to the military. Mukul Deva, ex-military personnel, was a Major in the Indian Army. He was commissioned in 1981 into the Sikh Light Infantry. After fifteen years of service in active combat duty and operations in India and overseas, he opted for an early retirement. An alumnus of La Martiniere College, Lucknow, the National Defence Academy, Pune and the Indian Military Academy, Dehradun, Mukul Deva, shows how the military force is used strategically to boost the global alliance and attain a balance of power. In the modern scenario, war has become inevitable as a realistic response to the anarchic condition of the world.

The military novels creatively explore the role and challenges of the Indian military in the Warfield and internal security issues. The trained Indian military officials and soldiers, around 4.2 million, follow a typical and unique military culture. This culture is mainly influenced by our erstwhile rulers' military ethos, i.e., the British military ethos. Gradually, it has integrated the regional valourous tints into its ethics. Military ethics are conspicuously different from those of everyday civil ethics. Novels written by ex-military personnel on military issues invariably comprise the military culture internalised by trained veterans. Military writers analyse and deal with the 'zero points' of the plot structure. This genre's realistic treatment of plot, characterisation, and narrative styles are critical to understanding radicalism's development.

The term 'military' originated in the late Middle English period. Its origin is in French, 'militaire,' and in Latin, 'militaris,' which means 'soldier'. The word 'military' refers to a country's armed forces. 'Military' is an adjective that relates to or is characteristic of soldiers or armed forces. Thus, fictional work related to the armed forces can be termed 'Military Fiction'.

Military Culture:

The military's purpose is to serve and protect the nation. Its culture incorporates unity, a sense of purpose and direction, and values not found in most civilian careers. Although it is sometimes dysfunctional, it drives service members to complete tasks for a joint mission. Military culture has aspects such as uniformity, anonymity, depersonalisation, expendability, hard work, boredom, teamwork, camaraderie, stoicism, loneliness, trust and orderliness. Military culture is a collective one, where one is a tight-knit, cohesive group achievement, whereas, in civil life, the emphasis is on the individual. The unit's goals are always placed ahead of one's personal goals. In civil life, self-reliance is followed by Western standards. In the military, one's job is a profound characterisation of identity among peers. For military members and their families, military life provides a sense of community and distinctly structured expectations, rules and guidelines. A common saying or mindset in the military is "Never assume. If you don't know, then ask," particularly in combat if a service member assumes something. The purpose of the military is to promote strong character and increase the morale and welfare of the force. A 'motive' is a reason for doing something. It is a learned drive, an emotion, desire, physiological need, or similar impulse that acts as a stimulus to action. Understanding one's own potential biases, expectations, and beliefs is an essential first step in becoming more culturally competent. The military transforms people from diverse backgrounds into soldiers. Associating religious bias with a soldier is the biggest insult to his integrity.

The four *Lashkar* series present the struggles of everyday Indian life with a 'system-centric realism.' The truthful treatment of reality and the undramatic and non-romantic experiences of India's middle and lower-class people provide concrete facts of reality.

“It was Salim’s initiative that Pakistan began to focus attention on Nepal and Bangladesh. They proved ideal for getting at India at virtually no cost to Pakistan. ‘Isn’t it strange,’ Salim mused to his Adjutant in a rare moment of introspection, ‘how easy it is to foment hatred and violence?’ (Deva 34)
Lashkar (2008)

Lashkar has the plot of a terror attack in Delhi, masterminded by Pakistan’s Intelligence Agencies and the Indian government’s mode of tackling with the involvement of Force 22, an elite unit of the Indian Defense Services, specialised in operations. Iqbal, a young man from the small town of Lucknow in India, is recruited at the masquerade and taken across the Pakistani border to become a Mujahideen for the Pakistani military. The havoc and destruction caused during the training of Terrorists as ‘new graduates’ were glorified. Maulana exclaims, “See what heroic deeds we are capable of.” (Deva 6) The misguided civilian, shifting his emotional identity from the native land to that of the opponent, also alters the sensibilities. “All it requires is a little ingenuity and a lot of money” (Deva 14). The financial avarice of the enemy tracks the loopholes in the Indian political parties. The drugs, weapons and sale of nuclear technology generated millions of dollars for the spread of anti-social elements in the surrounding countries. The setting of the realistic portrayal feeds the global terror factory. The blind and biased mindset is shown in Salim’s characterisation: “...a deep, almost pathological, hatred of everything even remotely Indian!” (Deva 29) The pillars of Democracy, the police force, financial institutions, the communication network and other essential organisations were targeted.

On October 29th, 2005, Delhi bomb blasts occurred, led by Iqbal. When the Indian public was outraged, the directorate for Inter-service intelligence sent a top-secret group named Force 22 to find the bombers. Of Iqbal’s team, only he and his friend Omar could make it back across the Pakistani border. There, he learns that his mother, Hamida, a middle-aged lady and Navaz, his sister, a pretty teenage girl, died in the very blast. The collective responsibility of the civilians is a remote reality here. The individual benefactors rarely mind the massive damage created for the ignorant, common public. Captain Mohammed Sami, leading Force 22, eventually meets Iqbal, whose mindset is changed to philanthropic and Indian inclination.

The novel is identified for its criticism of the United States, the Pakistani military and the Bureaucracy. The terrific terrorism theme is dealt with in fine detail. Iqbal, an educated common man, can grow to such a height to become a menace to mankind. His tragedies cause an introspection, and he realises the wrong path has been chosen. Col. Rajan Anbu, heading Force 22, is called for a mission. Even though limited in size, the military culture of Force 22 curbs the galvanising power of terrorism. Like the books by international military writers such as Dan Brown, Tom Clancy, and Robert Ludlum, Mukul Deva is a fast-paced and action-packed novelist. The protagonist, Iqbal, is among the many unfortunate, misguided young men from India. *Lashkar* challenges the conventional wisdom of fiction writing. Iqbal, the native Indian, wakes up to reality very late. Humans became tools at the hands of exploitative political powers. The book is widely praised for depicting a strong Indian military response and for its detailed accounts of military actions. It has also been praised for its criticism of the United States, the Pakistani military, and the Bureaucracy of the Inter-Services Intelligence

Agency. It has received much praise for its idealised view of geopolitics and its comprehensive terrorism coverage.

As observed from the plot, this is a terrorism-based thriller, terrorism, which has become a grave problem for the world nowadays, and the book is written wonderfully. It is a fast, action-paced and detailed thriller. It is divided over timelines, and that too are intermingled. Different timelines work together, and all the scenes are nicely sewn together. There was no boredom, and it paced like a Super-fast train. Detailing is quite good. Maybe the knowledge is credited to the author's army background, but he has given quite an impressive description of landmarks, areas, and happenings in Pakistan and India; the combat knowledge is good. It is a hard-impacting book, and anyone who considers himself Indian should read this book as a true Indian always knew what India has faced through terrorism's hands. Everybody wants a reaction from their Indian counterparts, which is not happening. At times and places; the acts look more ambitious, as everything goes the Indian way but that is what the reader wants to read. Had the Indian politicians worked this way, we would think that any terrorist would think twice before striking our country.

"Deava has a Nostradamus touch."- The Statesman

Salim Must Die(2009)

The sequel of *Lashkar* continues to highlight the anti-courteous existence of Salim and his inevitable death for choosing the most heinous radical way of life. The Middle East, Afghanistan and Iraq are already exploding as the guns. Political leaders support the destructive route. According to the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), the definition of Terrorism is "Illegal violence to coerce others, or in pursuit of a political, economic, religious or social goal". Border issues and domination in international affairs are crucial in creating a good neighbourhood. The militant countries rarely care and protect everyday civilian life from the Islamist extremists.

Every nation is built on the solid foundation of its religion and culture. It is an undeniable fact. Citizens are emotionally attached to the greatness of their cultural heritage and grandeur. If anyone assaults that root, the result will be unimaginable. Even though India is a big country with diverse religions, cultures, and lifestyles, it is known for its cooperative and peaceful existence. Captain Mohammed Sami, the senior officer of Force 22, was living up to its motto of 'Stealth, Speed and Surprise'. To curtail the perennially hostile neighbours' clash, mere weapons do not hold good. Positive democratic countries can withhold the global connectivity of terrorism. As explained by Rao, the Neoconservatives influence much on America's foreign potency. To put the 'Eagle to Nest' is the challenge in *Salim Must Die*. "I do not know when you will see the writing on the wall..." (Deva 146) Tihar jail and the jailor represent the chains of civilised society.

"You have killed enough people, old man. Now it's time for you to die". (Deva 208)

The happy ending for Iqbal and Tanaz proves the ultimate expectations of military culture's motives: balancing and orienting quality life for the welfare of our nation. Waging war is the last resort for any shrewd country. While the literature of any civilization flourishes during peace, the most critical periods, like war and terrorism, induce many questions and complexities. "You have to be the change you want to see." (Deva 166)

Osama's capture is written in *Salim Must Die* in the hands of the US SEAL team. The wars and days of disturbance reinforce people's collective memory. Mukul Deva opines from his novels that terrorism is a multi-headed hydra which curtails the peace of the world. The anti-war movement can only be attained after curbing the fundamental problems of civilian life.

The Military theory helps to identify the writings that further our understanding of war and warfare. It guides professional military education and research for future doctrine and training. Military theory is a field of study that seeks to understand the phenomena of war and its links to broader conflict. It provides a framework for the valid creation and dissemination of the knowledge of war and warfare. In other words, it is the epistemology of war. Land, air and naval theories are pretty conventional, as they are grounded in the philosophy of scientific inquiry; they use hypothesis and empirical data based on history to develop their concepts. On the contrary, military theory favours philosophical insights. Carl von Clausewitz opined that scientific formulas and quantitative analysis can be undermined.

There is a difference between a military theory and a military notion. The knowledge of new military theory allows the planners, commanders and senior decision-makers to adapt their understanding to changing situations, environments and political objectives. The military theory analyses normative behaviour and trends in military affairs and history, apart from describing the events of the war. It observes the patterns in the inner structure of warfare. Military theory explains the propositions, principles, and cause-and-effect relationship of war.

COMPONENTS OF MILITARY THEORY:

1. Nature and character of modern war: 'Nature is a constant, universal, and inherent quality of war, whereas 'character' is transitory.
2. The elements of war: The action and reaction of these elements of warfare.
3. The non-military aspects which affect the preparation and conduct of war:
 - i) Impact of social factors
 - ii) Ideology of war
 - iii) Science and technology
 - iv) Power
4. The way and means of preventing the outbreak of war.

There can be a possible convergence between the conceptual Eastern and Western ways of war. Military theory is indispensable and provides a broader outlook for a General. *Encyclopedia of Military Science* highlights that '...military science often addresses related issues including... military theory.' In their book *Contemporary Military Theory*, Jan Angstrom and J J Widen outline the critical themes of military theory. Influential military theorists are Carl von Clausewitz, Alfred Thayer Mahan, Sun Tzu, Antoine-Henri Jomini, Giulio Douhet, Bernard Broddie, J.C. Wylie, Mikhail Frunze, Chanakya, etc., Prof Josiah Bunting III says in the JSTOR article of *Naval War College Review*, *The Military Novel* :

"...the military novel is seeks to capture what he considers the essence of war, those basic human 'truths' as they are exposed in that most demanding of all circumstances- combat."

Critics' view of war is usually the same as war novelists. War is hateful, if not downright bestial, to both of them. Military fiction is written by men who believe they are writing the truth- a truth that transcends the fictional devices used to express it. As Ernest Hemingway says, "A writer's job is to tell the truth." The best war novelists frequently come closer to the reality of war in their work than military historians. Ideally, military historians and military

novelists have complementary missions. The historian describes how wars were fought and for what reasons; the novelist is concerned with what the fighting meant to those who suffered, failed, or succeeded. Both work within the confines of observed or recorded human behaviour. Often, the military novel is a polemic. The military novelist is preoccupied with what we might call the underside of war, separating their corded achievements of armies and the private hells of suffering and terror.

Great military fiction may come close to Hemingway's "absolute truth" about war, but rarely is it attained. Fictional writing about war is mainly concerned with those who participate in war as soldiers. This definition excludes Lermontov's *A Hero of Our Time*, whose protagonist is a military officer but usually in 'off-duty' situations. Military fiction must be concerned with soldiers and war. War fiction is written by men who hate war and dislike the self-effacement that military organisations must insist upon. It is written by men who served in the enlisted ranks or as junior officers. In his *The Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides said, "What used to be described as a thoughtless act of aggression was now regarded as the courage; to think of the future and wait was merely another way of saying one was a coward. Any idea of moderation was just an attempt to disguise one's unmanly character; the ability to understand a question from all sides meant that one was unfit for action. The paper sheds light on the crucial issues of national and international borders, which also affect people and nations. The nations' past leaves an everlasting impression in creating or harming international relationships.

***Blowback* (2010)**

It is the third fictional work by Mukul Deva in the military novel genre, which revolves around two young Indians, both Muslims, a boy and a girl. Iqbal and Tanaz have been recruited by an intelligence agency called Force 22 and trained in the art of making and unmaking bombs, use of arms and weapons, intelligence activities and skills, survival and self-reliance strategies and sent on missions to Islamic terrorist training organisations like ISI and its agents like Mujahideens, Lashkare Toiba, etc, to not only spy for Force 22 but also scale their terrorist activities, such as planting bombs in public places in major Indian cities. In the process, Iqbal and Tanaz visit and undergo terrorist training at the centres across the Pakistan border and join hands with the Indian Mujahideens operating in India. Under cover to unearth their movements in India and also inform Force 22 about the nexus of the Mujahideen crave so that their terrorist acts can be wrapped in the bud. In their professional life, that can only be described as running with the hare, hunting with the hounds, or watching on the sharp edge of a sword. Tanaz, Iqbal's wife, loses her life, leaving behind a child as a token of her great sacrifice to live with Iqbal all his life and the readers for all time to come.

On yet another level, Mukul Deva expresses a blood-chilling, breath-ceasing, sensational setup underbelly of the terrorist outfits that have been shaking the very foundations of modern civilisation. The following analysis of the novel appears to support this idea. The novel opens in Angoor Adda, in South Waziristan, on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is a terrorist training centre where the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Mujahideen are trained in acts of terror and ISI and its subsidiary Force 22 run it. Moreover, eighteen young men were gathered to discuss the progress of their activities. The purpose for which those men were there was to establish the kingdom of God, one Islamic country based on the pristine, pure tenets of Islam.

We may belong to different groups, different tribes, different regions, but the god we worship is the same, and before everything else, we are Allah's soldiers. We have to bury our differences and get ready for the surge of fresh troops that the American president is sending into Afghanistan soon. We must greet them with such fury that they will never dare return. Their new president must realise that we call the shots in this part of the world. Perhaps he has forgotten that Afghanistan is called the Graveyard of Empires. We must remind him" (Deva 4).

Even though there are so many divisions within Islam, which the team members are aware of, they are not thinking about bringing all the factors together. In an irony of sorts, the group considers all the non-Muslims as non-believers and deserving to be eliminated by bombing towns and cities in India as it is a nation of Kafirs for them. This smacks their chest segments and immaturity in their understanding of human society. They are too young and have been brainwashed into believing that only Islam is the true religion and that any sacrifice in the name of the religion is a significant religious act, a great act appeasing God and humanity. In this sense, they earn the readers' sympathy but deserve to be condemned for blocking individual thinking and irrational ways of life.

That they are all from poverty-stricken backgrounds and conditions is explained by their lousy conditions in the terrorist training camp.

"The compound comprised several small houses, most of them mud-walled, though there were a few brick ones too. A shoulder-high mud wall encircled the entire cluster. Cowdung and debris littered the area. Broken furniture was strewn around on the flat roofs of most of the houses. It had the peculiar, unkempt feel of a place that was largely inhabited by men whose minds were occupied with things more important than cleanliness." (Deva 80)

Another fact that explains their desperate, humble situation is their willingness to risk their life for a small sum of money, ready to be killed, ready to be jailed, and hanged. All this was for the sum of money they gave to their poor parents before they reappeared from their poor families, their motherland and small towns.

In the second sequel of the Lashkar series, *Salim Must Die*, it is mentioned how the Indian Army caught forlorn Iqbal, and how Col Ambu made Iqbal fight for the cause of his country. We do not live under those circumstances. Iqbal and Tanaz joined Force 22. Iqbal has been "infiltrated" into a terrorist organisation by an Indian intelligence agency, Force 22. We see him as a member actively participating in the training camps and also working in the field on assignments given to him by the terrorist outfits and the Indian agency. In this sense, he is a double-edged sword; he cuts with the sides, and he wields the sharp edge of the sword. He is a double agent, hence works for the terrorists and those resulting in terrorism. He is trained in bomb-making and secretly plants them in public places to indiscriminately kill people, but he precludes to do it, cheating the terrorist network and working hard to save humanity while risking his life. Here, he earns the readers' admiration, sympathy and understanding for his bravery and sacrifice.

Iqbal is a rational Muslim boy; he is rational, unique, and extraordinary because he dearly understands that indiscriminate killing through 'hit and run' terrorist acts cannot be

established. He perfectly understands the loopholes in the ideology of the terrorist organisations. He feels, "It's not enough, ... There has to be more that we can do." (Deva 136) Col Ambu replies, "There is, actually... But it could be dangerous... very dangerous." (Deva 137) Iqbal has grown above the narrow, barbaric and irrational understanding of the humanity of terrorist organisations and also the promoters of such organisations. He understands that the terrorist acts as an eternal war, with no rules on unchartered territory with no certainty of an end and opposed to a peaceful continuation of life. He is not a blind follower of Islam or any other religious ideology but a believer in humanity. In this way, he is satisfied with the profession that he is in and is prepared to make any sacrifice. He is a brave boy of brave India who needs to grow above the sectarian interests of any religion or culture. Iqbal's bravery is ten times greater than that of a soldier on the battlefield in the sense that a soldier kills his enemy or gets killed by his enemy. At the same time, Iqbal, who eats and sleeps, lives with his enemy on totally uncertain terms and conditions.

Tanzeem (2011)

The plot comprises a group of men with an arsenal and shows the inner dilemmas of the fighters of both sides picturesquely without bias. Mukul Deva, the novelist, is interested in going deep into the original cause of the evil, which creates terror everywhere. Iqbal's wife, Tanaz, died during a mission against ISI. The review of Pakistan's internal security situation is narrated in detail. Iqbal is determined to take his revenge. Col. Ambu, commanding Force 22, is sad about the plight and agony of Iqbal.

"The path of the righteous man is beset on all by the inequalities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men."

-Book of Ezekiel

Ameer-ul-Momineem, whom Iqbal searched for avenging, explains to his tutor, Mullah Ismil Hamidi, about his selection of six men for *Tanzeem*. He intends for a total war against kafirs. This jihadi is using international cover-ups to hide their secret intention. Iqbal faces many setbacks during his entry to Jalakhel, where the Ameer hides. Fortunately, or unfortunately, the Ameer was there around Iqbal's path. Ameer got wounded by the American forces' air attack. Luckily for Ameer, Iqbal recognised him late! Iqbal has to cover up his identity to prove his worthiness... his life is at risk. The suspicion about Iqbal's strange entry and the 'Gora' attack filled the air with tension.

Tanzeem, the fourth and final of the *Lashkar* series by the ex-military personnel Mukul Deva, exposes the role of propaganda in changing the matrix of an ordinary man as well as the protagonist of the novel, Iqbal - one among many others shattered lives in India due to terror activities. The radicalism of mujahideen affects the personal, heavenly life of Iqbal. The training at the madrasa made him disturb the peaceful life of his own country. After his realisation, which came after the personal loss of his family members, he joined hands to subdue the terror maestro called Brigadier Murad Salim, an ISI agent of Pakistan. Iqbal's earlier losses of his mother and sister are also extended in consuming his wife, Tanaz. The shattered ex-jihadi, Iqbal, tunes himself to curb the subduing force against humanity. Religion, as a tool in the hands of the bigots, disturbs the nations' peace. The realistic approach to the Indian military novels unveils the core elements that mould the characters and their development towards realisation and progress.

The end of the Second World War brought many changes to the ideas and ideals of the world. The changes started to appear prominently after 1968. The post-modern approach comprised universalist notions of objective reality, morality, truth, human nature, reason, language and social progress. There was a reaction to the assumed certainty of reality. The

focus on the current social issues, realistic characterisation, plausible plot, and realistic setting leading to the unravelling of truth is the consequence of the mimesis. The world has lacked universal truth or a central hierarchy. The thinking wave was illogical and was based on unscientific, irrational thought and multiculturalism. The Lashkar series was based on an anarchical, non-totalized, indeterminate state of knowledge. The people believe in playing on the surfaces. They had less concern for the depth of subjects. Hyperreality and morality were relative here. The vainpace killed the peace of the mind and life in general.

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