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Propaganda and the Patterns of Victimisation

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Abstract: In the concept of propaganda, one can find the “positive feedback loop” (Volitaki), which can be used to spread disinformation. The conspiring people actively or passively consent to wrongdoing. Propaganda blinds a man’s vision, his ability to think, and his grasp of reality. In the modern world, we observe seven types of spreading propaganda. “A propagandist produces or spreads rumours, knowingly and deliberately, to further a cause or to damage an opposing cause” (Harris 2). The term ‘propaganda’ apparently came into everyday use in Europe as a result of the missionary activities of the Catholic church. In 1622, “Pope Gregory XV created in Rome the congregation for the propagation of the faith.” (Thomson 67). This study examines how human consciousness has responded to the destructive extremism that has spread worldwide.

Keywords: Loop, reality, rumours, consciousness and extremism.

In *Nichomachean Ethics* by Aristotle, it is said, “Every art and every inquiry and similarly every action and pursuit is thought to aim at some good, and for this reason, the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim” (78). However, this ‘good’ does not seem to be realised in the postmodern world because “terrorists and misled people handle the deadly lethal with playfulness” (Tylor 88). In the Lashkar series featuring ex-military personnel Mukul Deva, we witness this reality. After installing the RDX at the busy and crowded marketplace, the Lashkar team members “...walked away from the marketplace steadily. They finished their samosas as they walked.” (Deva, 2010, 245)

The Lashkar saga opens with a heinous act of terrorism, explaining the mother’s headless corpse. The middle-aged lady, Hamida and her teenage daughter, Navaz, represent the naïve mob who succumb to the atrocities of the male-dominated world of cruelty— terrorism. Women and children are the most affected victims in society due to war, battle or conflict (Das and Sen 19). The survivors carry the agony for a lifetime. Hamida was from Aligarh. She was born after the partition of India and Pakistan. Iqbal’s father silently faced the misfortune of a bomb blast, which befell his family— “All he felt was an emptiness. Inside him was an emotional wasteland” (Deva, 2008, 361). During the earthquake at Muzaffarabad, a helpless mother pleaded for the rescue of her little daughter, buried under the debris, “Please, son...please...my little girl” (Deva, 2008, 76). Iqbal called her



“Ammi” and felt towards her as if she were his mother. Six months of hard training to kill and destroy could not harden his heart.

Iqbal is in the guise of a terrorist, but in reality, he is an Indian intelligence agent. In the second novel of the Lashkar series, *Salim Must Die*, the Indian Army has caught Iqbal in the terrorist acts. Col Anbu transforms Iqbal from a terrorist into a soldier and guides him to fight for his country. Iqbal performs highly challenging tasks. After joining Force 22, Iqbal was sent to “infiltrate a terrorist group” (Bajpai 71) with which he was familiar. He was a member of a terrorist group actively participating in various acts of creating terror, and also an informer of the Indian Intelligence squad. In this sense, he is a double-edged sword. The transformation of a human into a weapon is the key feature of propaganda. He is trained in making and unmaking bombs and secretly planting them in public places to kill people indiscriminately. Still, he works against the terrorist network after his personal tragedy, works hard to save humanity while risking his life. Here, he earns the readers' admiration, sympathy and understanding for his valour and sacrifice.

Iqbal transforms from an innocent to a rational Muslim boy; he is unique and extraordinary. He clearly understands that indiscriminate killing through ‘hit and run’ terror acts, in a society based on the pristine pure tenets of Islam (Desai 48), cannot be established. He is aware of the loopholes in the ideology of the terrorist organisations. He cannot be a silent observer and wants to rectify the system. He feels, “It is not enough. There has to be more that we can do” (Deva, 2010, 136). Iqbal is not satisfied with the leisurely pace of the defence forces' retaliatory actions. The experienced veteran, Col Anbu, replies: “There is ..., but it could be dangerous... hazardous” (Deva, 2010, 137).

The officer, who can foresee the damaging effects of such retaliation action, worries about the aftereffects on the involved members because he knows the results would be deadly. 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 terrorist acts are a never-ending war with no rules, and “it is an uncharted territory with no certainty of an end” (Deepak 32). 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 his profession and prepared to make any sacrifice. He is a brave boy from unflinching India, which needs to rise above the sectarian interests of any religion or culture.



Iqbal's job 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, which is relatively less taxing to the mind than that of Iqbal's job, which involves eating, sleeping and living with his enemy on totally uncertain terms and conditions. Iqbal has been shot at, and he has suffered bullet injuries; two bullets have landed in his chest; he gets them removed and manages to live with timely medical assistance from the terrorist organisations who are there "everywhere in the jungles, tribal areas, cities and capitals in all forms and incarnations" (Devy 67). Iqbal has to answer Ameer's direct question, "So who are you really? Deep down...here. The Ameer tapped his chest. Friend or foe, a victim of circumstances or a traitor to the cause?" (Deva, 2011, 95). Iqbal loses his wife, Tanaz, but this does not deter him from continuing in his job as an infiltrator and an undercover agent serving the Indian Intelligence Team. He is clever, winning, and intelligent, and he lives a life of lies, which are the prerequisites for his chosen job. He snatches the motorcycle of a stranger and also takes away his valuable belongings, which is robbery and a punishable offence in civilian society. Still, he deserves forgiveness, as he is fighting to save millions of innocent lives. Similarly, his acts of indiscriminate killing of Pakistani intelligence agents and soldiers were an act of self-defence. Thus, "reinforced propaganda is synonymous with manipulation, disinformation, and false campaigns" (Williams 2). In another sense, his actions must be considered valourous, and he can be considered a true hero in the postmodern war-ridden world.

Tanaz, who marries Iqbal, as narrated later in *Salim Must Die*, in a way, is a victim of the vicious world of terrorism. She has taken training and joined this terrorist outfit to take revenge for recruiting two of her brothers and employing them to kill the police in Jammu and Kashmir. While facing a crisis, as is usual for terrorist groups and members, Tanaz handles the situation boldly and cleverly. She does not hesitate to use arms and weapons to escape from the enemy police or terrorist attacks. While Iqbal is hurt and wounded, she manages with presence of mind and rationally assesses the incidents well and also boldly encourages Iqbal to shoot the terrorists. However, she dares to be the same even in the face of death:

No! Iqbal shuddered with fear...Asif said harshly, she is as guilty as you are and must pay the same penalty.' While Asif talked, Iqbal felt Tanaz's hand slowly creep over his back. She was reaching for the pistol kept inside the shoe under the bed. The movement was not visible to any of the three men standing in the doorway because Iqbal's body



was in their line of sight. (Deva, 2010, 330)

As a recruit, she undergoes training at the Force 22 centre alongside fewer women and maintains her character and behaviour well. This speaks a lot about her integrity and physical energy. She resembles Khathila of Temsula Ao's story, "The Jungle Major." Tanaz undergoes the training meant for men; being a woman, she must be physically strong and have willpower. She has fallen in love with Iqbal and wants to marry and bear a child for him, but the battlefield is no haven for any family or conjugal bliss. However, among the men and women in terrorist groups like Lashkars, Muzahideens and Talibans, to have permanent partners, after marriage or by association, and permanent bonding is an illusion. She marries with a small ceremony of joy within the compound of the Force 22 office. To live each minute to the fullest is the task of every personnel.

Blowback (2010), the third fictional work by Mukul Deva, in the genre of military novels, revolves around two young Indians, both Muslims, a boy and a girl, Iqbal and Tanaz, who have been recruited by an intelligence 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(Pakistan) and its agents like Mujahideens, Lashkar- e- Toiba to not only spy for Force 22 and also scuttle their terrorist activities, such as the indiscriminate killing of people planting bombs in public places in major Indian cities. In the process, acting undercover, Iqbal and Tanaz visit terrorist training at the centres across the border in Pakistan and also join hands with the Indian Muzahiddeans' in India and abroad, make and unmake bombs, plant and diffuse and unearth their movements in India and, very importantly, inform the Force 22 about the Mujahideens so their terror acts can be nipped in the bud. In their professional life, that can only be described as 'run with the hare and hunt with the hounds' or 'walking 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. Mukul Deva expresses blood-chilling, breath-ceasing, and the rotting underbelly of the terrorist outfits that have been shaking the very foundations of modern civilisation.

The last sequel of the Lashkar saga, the novel *Tanzeem*, opens in Angoor Adda, South Waziristan, on the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is a terrorist training centre where the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and Mujahedin are trained in acts of terror, and ISI supports them. 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. Ammer-ul-Momineem, the Commander of the Faithful, who had called the meeting, said:

We may belong to different groups, different tribes, and different regions, but the God we worship is the same; before everything else, we are Allah's soldiers. We must bury our differences and prepare 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. Perhaps he forgot that we call the shots in this part of the world. Afghanistan is called the Graveyard of Empires. We must remind him. (Deva, 2010, 4)

Although there are so many divisions within Islam that do not see eye to eye, which the members of the team are pretty aware of, 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 of their short-sightedness 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 great sacrifice and an act of appeasing their God. In this sense, they earn the readers' sympathy but are condemned for lacking individual thinking and rational ways of life. The fault also lies with poverty that is haunting the people of the third world background, which is explained by their living conditions in the training camp:

The compound comprised several tiny houses, most mud-walled, though there were a few brick ones too. A shoulder-high mud wall encircled the entire cluster. Cow dung and debris littered the area. Broken furniture was strewn around the flat roofs of most of the houses. It had the peculiar, unkempt feel of a place inhabited mainly 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 lives for a small sum of money, ready to be killed, prepared to be jailed, hanged to death, and they were buried inside a jail in India. All this for a sum of money they may have given to their poor parents before they disappeared from their



mohallas and small towns, the low-income families. The news about missing young boys suspected of having joined terrorist organisations has become very ordinary in the dailies and news channels.

In a world beset with uncertainties and the darkest areas of life, Tanaz emerges as a shining star, determined to expose and eradicate the terrorist network. Like Iqbal, her husband, she has also risen above the narrow and sectarian views of the terrorist outfits about the Islamic religion. She understands that no peace and harmonious life can ever be achieved through hatred and bloodshed. All that boasting about pristine, pure Islamic faith does not convince her. On the other hand, although Tanaz has joined the terrorist organisation, it is not to promote but to take revenge on ISI. In these acts, she earns the readers' deep respect.

Tanaz dies at the end of the novel after giving birth to a child. Suspecting her and her husband, Iqbal, to be working against the terrorist strategies, Asif and Mujib have tortured her, which leads to her death. It is not uncommon for the people associated with terror groups or spying on terror groups to be in such a way, as they live a hazardous and uncertain life. In her bravery, intelligence, and clear cunningness lies the beauty of her character, making her a memorable character in the world of Indian military novels.

While Iqbal and Tanaz work for the nation, earning the appreciation of the readers, there are so many others- their co-terrorists or group members whose lives have universally been condemned as criminal. Based on the terrorist networks, some nations have been declared 'rogue' nations.

They have a life of anonymity when they are alive and when they die, with their bodies dismembered by the bombs, bullets or shells of the police or the army. They have lost their identity, the right to live, and all the joys of life that ordinary citizens enjoy. Because they are terrorists, once branded as terrorists, they cease to be members of the civilised world. The lives of Asif, Mujib, Imtiaz, Khalid, and many like them. Whether a leader or an ordinary field hand, a bomb maker or a planter, they die in ignominy as the world has united against terrorism.

The third group in the novel is part of each nation's intelligence wing. These are MQ-9 and Force 22 members. On the Indian side, Col Rajan, Capt Vikram Tiwathia, Capt Anitha Bhatnagar, and many others are the first government employees, and their services are highly confidential and essential to the government in maintaining control and checking terrorist activities. Occasionally, their actions are recorded, and meritorious



service is also rewarded. Although they enjoy all the necessary support- logistic, technical, financial, and intelligence extended to them by various agencies, they also run the risk of being the targets of terrorist groups and organisations. The timely help they render to Iqbal and Tanaz is part of their duty and responsibility. A nation's safety and security largely depend on the honesty and integrity of those in such positions. They earn readers' appreciation and respect.

The genre 'military novel' deserves to be supported, galvanised, and popularised, so that more readers read it, as it teaches society to guard itself against terrorists and their activities. Every citizen needs to participate in the universal struggle to be ruled by terror-funding and promoting organisations. People need to be educated, and Mukul Deva's writings in this direction are rendering invaluable service to humanity.

Brigadier Sanjeev Kanal opines that Deva's in-depth knowledge of military affairs and his lucid storytelling style make the reader crave more. Another critic, Neena Singh, appreciates the novelist's attention to detail in making his characters come to life. 'The Hindu' credits Mukul Deva as India's first military action thriller writer. 'Hindustan Times' identifies Deva's capability as a political commentator and soothsayer of national defence. The novel presents Deva's dream of a terror-free India. The detailing of Pak-sponsored terrorism in India is elaborated in this novel. Except that the characters have names like Vikram and Rajan and Ankita and Iqbal, or that all the locales are in places like Ahmadabad, Pune, and Faisalabad, this book could have been a Ludlum, Clancy, or Forsyth.

Like the *Dragon Fire* of Humphrey Hawksley, the South Asian conflicts have also been the subject of *Blowback*. Unlike Hawksley's wooden characters, Deva could sketch his characterisation more accurately. The fanatic patriotism in both the lead characters and the opponents makes them one-dimensional. This well-spun story of difficulties and tackling tools of bravery and fortitude tells the modern story of suffering; even the good and the bad suffer. There is no such single-party winner. The crux lies in the moral dilemma of the 'good' characters. Iqbal exclaims during his training, "I will not plant bombs that kill innocent people." (Deva, 2008, 161). Ironically, the terrorist, Asif, repeats, "Rules are rules, and they are the same for everyone."

In 'Indian Streams Research Journal', an article published in April 2014, Bandu A Kamble identifies terrorists' ideology in Mukul Deva's *Blowback*. The researcher traces the origin of terrorism, its sources and

its horrible effects on Indian society. However, he references two partition novels, *Train to Pakistan* and *Azaadi*, as novels on terrorism. However, in reality, both these novels deal with the effects of partition on the people of erstwhile Hindustan. Bandu Kamble ascertains that the two novels of Partition show the use of terror to possess others' property. However, as his argument goes, *Blowback* displays the use of terrorism against the democratic government of India. The novelist Mukul Deva quotes in the text Christopher Hitchens' definition of terrorism, "Terrorism is the tactic of demanding the impossible, and demanding it at gunpoint. "As observed, the ideology of Ameer ul Momineem, who 'devastated the once beautiful Swat Valley' (Deva, 2010, 5), mentions his purpose: "What I propose goes far beyond anything the TTP (Tehrik-e-Taliban) could have hoped to achieve. It will change the way the battle is fought. I want to expand our base and embroil the kafir in a quagmire of conflict. That spans every corner of the globe." (Deva, 2010, 7)

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