

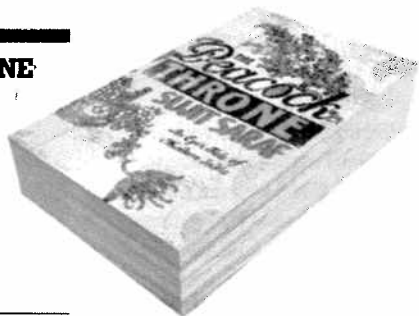
BOOKS

THE PEACOCK THRONE

Sujit Saraf
(Sceptre, £12.99)

MOSQUITO

Roma Tearne
(Harper Press, £14.99)



FOREIGN BODIES

Like Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy* and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, Sujit Saraf's second novel, *The Peacock Throne*, is a vast and multi-layered Indian saga which is as much the story of the place as it is of any character. Don't worry – the patronising comparisons stop here. Saraf's novel is far more accessible than its predecessors, deals with a more recent period of history, and brings something entirely fresh to the pantheon of heavyweight Indian novels written in English.

Beginning in 1984 with the assassination of Indira Ghandi, the story follows the clueless tea-seller Gopal Pandey, the Bangladeshi street child Gauhar, and boho socialist Chitra through Delhi's Chandni Chowk district. Full of political intrigue, schemes,

accidents, murderers and pimps, *The Peacock Throne* breathes life into the busy streets and precarious existences of their inhabitants.

Political intrigue of a more sinister sort simmers in Roma Tearne's *Mosquito*. Set in Sri Lanka, the novel centres on a burgeoning romance between Theo, a widower in his forties recently returned to his native country and Nulani, a beautiful and artistic young girl. Tearne juxtaposes – sometimes rather unsubtly – the sensuous beauty of their love and their country against the violent struggle between the Tamil Tigers and native Singhalese. A dark undertow threatens to engulf everybody in this tense, delicate and very personal rendering of a tragic political situation.

EMMA RUBACH