

**The Peacock Throne**Sujit Saraf  
Sceptre, £12.99

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Gopal Pandey is a tea seller on Chandni Chowk, Old Delhi's main commercial thoroughfare. He wakes up feeling grouchy one morning in 1984, expecting nothing much from the day—but

by nightfall Indira Gandhi has been shot in the area, Gopal is embroiled in the resultant mayhem and he has, despite himself, gained ownership of a huge amount of money. *The Peacock Throne* follows the sometimes hapless, sometimes ruthless course of his life over the next 15 years.

An inadvertent witness to many key historic moments, Gopal finds political power in his grasp.

Will the charm of the innocent have a lasting effect on the

nature of politics, or vice versa? Despite the novel's narrative being a little too dependent on quirky twists of fate at times (uncomfortable memories of *Forrest Gump* do spring to mind occasionally) this is a story considerably darker, more cynical and yet more rewarding than Hollywood would ever permit.

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Nevertheless, it's pretty hard not to refer to *The Peacock Throne's* considerable length, which is largely a result of Saraf's highly intricate prose style—you will either find this level of description frustrating or you won't.

While it doesn't veer into particularly farcical territory—and if you're a fan of Vikram Seth you'll have built up more than enough stamina to appreciate this level of intricacy—the detail can slow the plot at crucial points and occasionally befuddle the development of the characters.

But the characters are lively enough to cope with this—and are the reason that this novel succeeds. Whirlwind tours of modern Indian history and lavish descriptions are incidental treats relative to spending time with Gopal Pandey and his determination to seize all that life has to offer, as well as the supporting characters who make this book a treat.

**ALEXANDRA HEMINSLEY**

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SUJIT SARAF

*An Epic Tale of Modern India*