

# Still waters

Funny and pacy, this almost-whodunnit explores the Indian family — with a twist

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**F**AMILIES — large, sprawling, happy, secretive, feuding and sometimes strange. There's something about families that have drawn many an author towards them, each of them have woven tales around them with varied takes. Debutant novelist Reeti Gadekar's *Families at Home* is another such story that explores relationships within an Indian family but she serves it with a fresh new twist.

The Talwars are an upper class, politically connected business family in Delhi — who at first glance seem to be the epitome of traditional Indian values. But their picture perfect existence comes to an end and they are pushed into the public eye when their daughter — Saudamini Talwar — commits suicide.

Enter the protagonist — Additional Commissioner of Police Nikhil Juneja — a 40-year-old roguish Delhi cop who constantly hopes the high profile case will help him get the right connections and the yearned for promotion. The glitch — the suicide turns out to be a murder.

Juneja's efforts at investigating the murder form the rest of the plot. Juneja's personal dilemmas and professional dealings form a lively and critical part of the narrative. Gadekar in fact paints a very realistic picture of the Delhi Police through the characters — most of whom are corrupt, arrogant and without a conscience — but for Joseph — a Keralite bound to Delhi through marital ties who still believes that the police must serve the society. All of them however are clueless and manage to bungle up even the simplest of tasks and cases — a



**FAMILIES AT HOME**  
Reeti Gadekar

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"Juneja smiled. For keeps. That was really the problem. Everything was for keeps and momentary, all at the same time. India, Delhi, the police, were all momentary and permanent lapses of reason. Nothing changed but the faces kept changing all the time."

telling reflection of the police force we see today. And then there is the city of Delhi, which not only forms the backdrop, but is often a character in its own right. The author's love and nostalgia for the city is evident. The book is filled with vivid descriptions of Delhi — be it the posh Greater Kailash market, the historic Chor Minar or the bustling lanes of Janakpuri.

The author has a quirky style of writing and shows that even the supremely serious can be written in an irreverent way without compromises. Despite the number of concurrent narratives, the book is pacy and reads well. In a paradox of

sorts, the Talwar family and the interplay between its various members is a grey area. For despite the fact that the victim and the suspects all come from within it, the reader doesn't get to know them well enough and is left with many questions unanswered. Many of the links in the chain of events are also left completely unexplained. In fact the motive of the murder is also explained fleetingly as if it is not important enough.

And then there is one glaring factual error in the book that is almost unpardonable. The murder victim is initially described as being 27-years-old (Page 22) but her age later on is reduced to 23 years (Page 120.) But despite shortcomings, this is an engaging and fairly funny book.