



The Sea of Innocence

Kishwar Desai

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The Sea of Innocence Details

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Dil says

The Sea of Innocence
Kishwar Desai

India, a country where a number of women who are raped and molested each and everyday yet has number of tourist attractions which attracts thousands of tourists each and every year. And this is the story of a young girl, who came to India as a tourist and then decided to settle down there.

The story tell about how corrupted the system is and what they have to pay if they interrupt the usual way which things are done. This talks about how everyone becomes entangled in the system and when they try to come out, they have to pay a huge price for that.

Though this story is told in a quite good manner, I can't help but notice how Simran acts quite stupid in some instances. For example, she has no hesitation in accepting drinks from total strangers even when she knew that they were somewhat responsible for the murder. And she blindly continues the relationship with Marian, even when she knows that Marian is not telling the complete truth. These aspects made the story unbelievable.

In my opinion author's Origins of Love was a much better story than this.

VaultOfBooks says

By Kishwar Desai. Grade B

Sea of Innocence is Desai's third foray into the social-worker-cum-investigator Simran Singh series, and my first. The genre and cover intrigued me, but it was the blurb that shifted it to the top of my humongous to-be-read pile. Whether intentional or not, the author grabs immediate attention by referring to the brutal gang-rape of a young women in a public Delhi bus in December 2012. The wounds that instance inflicted on the millions of young woman around the country – including yours truly – are still fresh, and this came across as the proverbial hammer striking when the iron is hot.

A spinster in her forties, Simran Singh needs a break from her busy life. She hightails to Goa to vacation with her teenage daughter, and spends her languorous days on the fabulous beaches of the former Portuguese colony. But barely a few days in, she receives a disturbing message from her friend and ex-flame, Amarjit, who is also a police superintendent in Delhi. A British teenage girl, suspected of being involved in the infamous Goa drug scene, has gone missing and is suspected to be dead. The message Simran received is a video of her being roughed up by a few local boys, but Liza is too stoned to realize what's going on. As is often the case in India, a minister high up the totem pole is suspected to be involved, and Amarjit needs someone subtle to carry out the investigation. He tries to get Simran sleuthing, who is just as adamant not to ruin her holiday. Unfortunately for her, she has a daughter roughly around Liza's age, and her soft heart and irrepressible curiosity cannot be denied. All she has going for her is Liza's erratic sister Marian, who goes AWOL without notice, and seems to be leading Simran around in circles. The Goan community is close-knit,

and not even the possible murder of an outsider will get the people talking.

Simran spends many frustrating days trying to separate truth from fiction, and figuring out who to trust. The people responsible get the whiff of her investigation, and scare her daughter back to Delhi. Determined to keep the truth buried, they also try to drug Simran so that she will abandon their trail, but these instances only harden Simran's resolve to get to the bottom of this mystery.

At first I could not understand why the author chose an investigator protagonist who is in her mid-forties and a mother of two. Call me conventional, but most forty-five year old women I know are hardly suitable to expose a dangerous drug trade and chop up a minister or two. But Simran is different; she is unapologetic about her penchant for beer and cigarette, and if she wants to don risqué beachwear, God help the person who dares to criticize.

There is a reason why Simran is the perfect protagonist for this series. The issues that Desai explores, surrogacy and rape, are not something an average Indian male is equipped to handle. Despite many attempts on her life, Simran continues to investigate Liza's case because she felt strongly for Jyoti who died in December, and the Scarlett Keeling case of 2008. Having a daughter the age of the victim spurred her on further.

The plot is brisk, seamlessly entwining the issues of sexual violence roiling in the country with the bigger problem of sexuality, the general perception of women, and the use of vices like drugs and gambling to escape reality. The author paints a haunting, dark picture of Goa, with its beautiful beaches and sinister denizens.

(extract)

There was an uncomfortable and very apparent dichotomy between life on the beach and the rest of Goa. The sandy rim of the sea seemed almost like another country, which was, for some, ruled by its own laws of behaviour. Even though the beaches looked serenely cosmopolitan on the surface and offered a variety of sea sports and other innocent pleasures, there was a looming darkness around the edges. Like a hungry, nocturnal sea animal it padded through the sand, seeking victims...A suspicion of it was in the dead eyes of some of the beach boys, and the cynicism with which they looked at the near-naked bodies strewn on the beach. Not everyone on the beach was here for a good time. Or perhaps everyone had a different description of what a 'good time' was.

The writing, as is evident, is above average, although I do wish there was more showing than telling. On top of this, most of the action takes place off-stage and is later narrated by Simran in a few sentences. Due to this reason, the denouement completely lost its impact. The thrilling conclusion to an intricate story was wrapped up within a few pages, and all in the past tense, leaving a very dissatisfied reader.

It's definitely an interesting book that explores in detail a lot of sensitive issues with a lot of sensitivity and heart. It is not an easy read, and if you can look past a few aberrations, quite worth your time.

"Originally reviewed at Vaultofbooks.com, a close-knit community of fanatical readers. We are looking for perceptive readers who can write well, and we are eager to provide lots of free books in exchange for reviews. Shot us a mail at contact@vaultofbooks.com"

Georgie says

It was like taking the lid off someone's head & reading all the fleeting thoughts that flit about there with no filter. All a bit unbelievable and silly despite the potentially serious subject matter.

Nikoleta Katsiouli says

Το συγκεκριμένο βιβλίο πεσε στα χέρια μου τυχαία, αλλά το θέμα του μου τρέβηξε το ενδιαφέρον και τσι αποφάσισα να αρχίσω αμσως την ανγνωση του. Πραγματικ, ε?ναι ?να βιβλίο το οπο?ο μου ε?ναι πολ? δ?σκολο να μιλ?σω για αυτ? καθ?ς πραγματε?εται ?να πραγματικ? δ?σκολο θέμα, αυτ? της σεξουαλικ?ς κακοπο?ησης. Το «Παριδευμ?νες στη Σιωπ?», το τρ?το βιβλίο της Κισου?ρ Ντεσαι στη σειρ? της Σιμρ?ν Σινγκ μας δ?νει μια ιστορ?α που δ?σκολα θα ξεχ?σουμε .

Η κοινωνικ? λειτουργ?ς του Δελχ? Σιμρ?ν Σινγκ ?χει απ?λυτη αν?γκη για διακοπ?ς. ?τσι αποφασ?ζει να π?ρει την ?φηβη κ?ρη της και να ταξιδ?ψουν στις ειδυλλιακ?ς παραλ?ες της Γκ?α στην Ινδ?α. Και οι δ?ο χρει?ζονται αυτ? το δι?λειμμα απ? την καθημεριν?τητα τους, χρ?νο για να επανασυνδεθο?ν και να απομακρυνθο?ν απ? την τ?σο απαιτητικ? δουλει? της Σιμρ?ν που δεν της αφ?νει χρ?νο για καν?ναν ?λλο. Ωστ?σο, οι 10 ημ?ρες των διακοπ?ν τους δεν π?νε ?πως ε?χε προγραμματ?σει καθ?λου .

Η Σιμρ?ν λαμβ?νει ?να μ?νυμα απ? τον πρ?ην εραστ? της, και πλ?ον καλ? της φ?λο, Αμαρζ?τ. Το μ?νυμα περιλαμβ?νει ?να β?ντεο απ? μια ξανθι? μικρ? κοπ?λα η οπο?α ε?ναι σε κακ? κατ?σταση και προφαν?στατα κακοποιε?ται απ? κ?ποιους ?νδρες. Η κοπ?λα φ?νεται να ε?ναι η Λ?ζα Κ?ι, μια Βρεταν? ?φηβη που ?χει χαθε? στην Γκ?α. Αν και η Σιμρ?ν δεν θ?λει να εμπλακε? , ξ?ρει ?τι δεν μπορε? να αγνο?σει το β?ντεο και με ο,τι συνεπ?γεται αυτ?. Ο Αμαρζ?τ πιστε?ει ?τι εκε?νη ε?ναι το καταλληλ?τερο πρ?σωπο για να ασχοληθε? με την υπ?θεση και στη συν?χεια να μιλ?σει με την αδερφ? της Λ?ζας ,Μ?ριαν, με την οπο?α συμπτωματικ?ς ταξ?δευαν μαζ? στη Γκ?α.

Η Σιμρ?ν δε?χνει να ε?ναι η μοναδικ? επιλογ? της Μ?ριαν, ?στε να καταφ?ρει να μ?θει την αλ?θεια για την αδερφ? της. Ανησυχε? ?τι δεν πα?ρνει ?λες τις πληροφορ?ες που χρει?ζεται για να την εντοπ?σει και αυτ? επειδ? η τοπικ? αστυνομ?α ε?ναι εμφαν?ς αναξι?πιστη και συχν? , ε?κολα δωροδοκε?ται.

Η απ?φαση της Σιμρ?ν ε?ναι μον?δρομος, αφο? δεν μπορε? να αγνο?σει ?να τ?σο αποτρ?παιο ?γκλημα . Στ?λνει την κ?ρη της με τη μητρ?α της στο Δελχ? και ετοιμ?ζεται να ερευν?σει την υπ?θεση της Λ?ζα , ?stw και αν με αυτ?ν τον τρ?πο θ?σει τη ζω? της σε σοβαρ? κ?νδυνο αφο? δεν μπορε? να γνωρ?ζει τις απειλητικ?ς προεκτ?σεις της ιστορ?ας.

Η πρωτοπρ?σωπη αφ?γηση της συγγραφ?ως, μ?σω της Σιμρ?ν, με ?κανε πραγματικ? να απολα?σω το βιβλίο. Η απλο?κ? γλ?σσα και το π?θος που δε?χνει μ?σα απ? τη γραφ? της η κυρ?α Ντεσ?ι θα σας κ?νει πραγματικ? να νι?σετε την ιστορ?α σαν να ?σασταν ?νας απ? τους χαρακτ?ρες της. Αυτ? το μυθιστ?ρημα μπορε? ε?κολα να διαβαστε? ως αυτ?νομο, αφο? ο μ?νος κοιν?ς παρονομαστ?ς στη σειρ? ε?ναι η πρωταγων?στρια Σιμρ?ν, που κ?θε φορ? ?χει και μια ν?α υπ?θεση να φ?ρει εις π?ρας.

Η Κισου?ρ Ντεσ?ι συνεχ?ζει να γρ?φει ενδιαφ?ρουσες ιστορ?ες, με μια ενδιαφ?ρουσα και παθιασμ?νη ηρω?δα που καλε?ται να διερευν?σει δι?φορα ψυχοκοινωνικ? ζητ?ματα που αντιμετωπ?ζει η σ?γχρονη Ινδ?α. Θα ?θελα να συστ?σω σε ?λους σας τα βιβλ?α της.

Το Βιβλ?ο κυκλοφορε? απ? τις εκδ?σεις Μ?νωας .

Shenaaz says

The blurb reeled me in however didn't enjoy the rantings of irrelevant stuff when more important things i.e. the narrative needed to be told.

Lamprinh Kliafa says

Η Συμρ?ν, κοινωνικη λειτουργ?, βοηθ? συχν? τις αρχες στην εξιχν?αση εγκλημ?των. Π?ει διακοπ?ς στη Γκ?α με την κ?ρη της, αλλα δεν καταφ?ρνει να χαλαρ?σει μιας και στο κινητ? της ερχεται ενα β?ντεο με την σεξουαλικ? κακοπο?ηση μιας αν?λικης κοπ?λας απο μια ομ?δα αντρων. Το μ?νημα ?ρχεται απο ενα αστυνομικ? φιλο της, ο οποιος της ζητα να βοηθησει στην ανε?ρεση της εξαφανισθε?σας κοπ?λας. Αναλαμβάνει αυτη την αποστολ? η οπο?α βαζει σε κινδυνο πολλο?ς ανθρωπους, ακομα και την ιδια. Ενα ?κρως σκληρ? αλλα ταυτ?χρονα ρεαλιστικο μυθιστ?ρημα, το οπο?ο θιγει πολλα κοινωνικ? φαιν?μενα. Η κακοπο?ηση σε ολες της τις μορφες, τα καρτ?λ ναρκωτικων, η σιωπ? των μαρτ?ρων λογω φ?βου, ο υποβιβασμος της γυν?κας και η κατ?χρηση εξουσ?ας ειναι καποια απο τα στοιχε?α που συνθετουν την ιστορ?α καθ?ς και την κοινων?α της Ινδ?ας. Ε?ναι γραμμ?νο σε πρ?το πρ?σωπο, κατι που προσδ?δει σασπενς μιας και αισθανεσαι πως εισαι διπλα στην ηρωιδα και ψαχνεις το ν?μα μαζ? της.

Lauren K says

Sea of Innocence is the third novel by Kishwar Desai featuring Indian social worker, Simran Singh. I'm yet to read the first novel, Witness the Night, but I have read Origins of Love, a novel about surrogacy and IVF in India, which was a fascinating read. So when I heard about Desai's latest novel set in Goa, the beautiful coastal region in South India (where I visited last year) and Simran's investigation of murders and rapes of foreign women in this area, I knew I'd be in for an interesting read.

Given the subject matter, this novel is not easy to read at times. There are detailed accounts of sexual assaults, but told through the simplistic language of Desai and the matter-of-fact viewpoint of Simran it was easier to stomach. Simran is holidaying in Goa with her adopted sixteen-year old daughter when she is contacted by Amarjit (her ex-boyfriend and) a police officer who is quietly investigating the disappearance of a young British girl, named Liza. The investigation happens to be good timing as Amarjit discovers Simran is already in Goa and makes attempts to convince her to make some enquiries. Simran is reluctant to work on the case as she intends to spend some time with her daughter. But when she receives a video on her phone showing young Liza being sexually assaulted, Simran's curiosity and empathy are elicited and she

begins to make subtle enquiries. One would think that when her daughter and friends get a scare from some local men and Simran receives further anonymous videos that she would shy away from this increasingly dangerous case, but Simran becomes more determined to find out the truth behind Liza's disappearance. She sends her daughter back to the safety of her mother in Delhi and starts to make waves in South Goa.

Intrigued by Liza's evasive sister Marian, manipulated by the local beach vendor and the receipt of anonymous photos and videos, Simran keeps up her investigation. Even when she is drugged and her computer is wiped clean of any evidence, Simran doesn't give up. Instead she befriends Dennis who teams up with her on the case and together they begin to make many enemies. From an underground drug network, to powerful men preying on foreign girls to a politician who won't let anyone get in his way of climbing up the ladder, Simran's investigation gets very interesting.

I slipped easily into the first person viewpoint of Simran as I really enjoy the simplistic language and the passion she shows toward empowering women and uncovering the truth. This novel can easily be read as a standalone, as the only common denominator in the series is Simran but it's a new location and new case each time. I particularly found interesting the Goan setting in this story, as some of the issues raised in the story I suspected while I was holidaying there last year and some of which I'm glad not to have known. Even though I loved India, Goa wasn't one of my favourite places and this story certainly doesn't tempt me to return. Desai continues to write intriguing stories set in India with an interesting and passionate heroine that explores various psychosocial issues facing modern India. I recommend this series and I'm eager to read her first novel, *Witness the Night*.

Reema says

'The Sea of Innocence' is the third book in the trilogy by Kishwar Desai. The first one was 'Witness the Night' and the second one was 'Origins of Love'. The only connections between the three are the main protagonist Simran Singh, and the fact that each one of them deal with a women-centric issue. 'Witness the Night' was about female infanticide while 'Origins of Love' was about Surrogacy and IVF.

About the Book (from the blurb):

Goa, south India. A beautiful holiday hideaway where hippies and backpackers while away the hours. But beneath the clear blue skies lies a dirty secret...

Simran Singh is desperate for a break and some time away from her busy job as a social worker-come-crime investigator. And so the unspoilt idyll of Goa seems just the place - white beaches, blue seas and no crime.

But when a disturbing video appears on her phone, featuring a young girl being attacked by a group of men, she realises that a darkness festers at the heart of this supposed paradise. And when she discovers out that the girl is Liza Kay, a British teenager who has gone missing, she knows she must act in order to save her.

But first Simran must break through the web of lies and dark connections that flourish on these beaches. Everyone, it seems, knows what has happened to the girl but no one is prepared to say. And when more videos appear, and Simran herself is targeted in order to keep her quiet, the paradise soon becomes a living nightmare.

My thoughts:

Kishwar Desai does not beat around the bush. Her first few lines are always the attention-grabbers. She comes straight to the point (or the case).

The main protagonist in the series, Simran Singh, is a 46-year old social worker (who really ends up being a detective for the cases she gets embroiled in). Simran Singh is long past conventional marriageable age, loves her smoke and destresses with alcohol. She is headstrong but gullible at times; though her heart is in the right place. She has a penchant for courting risks by meddling into cases related to vulnerable women, which usually also runs her into powerful politicians and inefficient police. Her family consists of her mother and an adopted teenage daughter, Durga (who was part of 'Witness the Night').

Quite evidently, the book has taken liberally from the much-publicised Scarlett Keeling case. You may read about the case [here](#). Since it was dealing with sexual crime against women, the book also gives a lot of references of the recent Delhi gang-rape case and other such reported cases, which sometimes puts the narrative off-track. But clearly, author's motive was to highlight the injustice meted out to women like Scarlett Keeling who have been victims of sexual violence and who are now lost into oblivion with several perpetrators yet to be brought to books.

Honestly speaking, the author had much to consider in putting all the strings together for this book. Having the protagonist on the crime scene; involving her in situations in which Scarlett was found dead; also incorporating the recent, much publicized Delhi rape case and other sexual violence reports; Simran's pursuit of the case; inserting a romantic angle; and moreover, the setting of Goa had its own baggage like issues of locals against tourists, problems due to modernization, night life, surge in crime, the drugs mafia, et al. I felt there were a few unnecessary, cringe-worthy sequences about the sexual violence.

What I admire about the author is her ability to highlight a social, women-centric issue and weave a fascinating, fast-paced thriller around it. Perhaps it is her years of experience in journalism that helps her accomplish that. In retrospect, since I had read her previous 2 books, perhaps I had unrealistic expectations from the third one. But if you like this one, trust me, you will love the other ones more.

This book is not a masterpiece but like all Kishwar Desai's books, it is a compelling read, woven around topical women-centric issues, and like always, it too strikes a note. The only issue with all of the author's three books is that their endings do little justice to the fast-paced narratives. But having said that I feel this book will work for the readers who like thrillers or crime-based fiction.

Read more reviews by me here: <http://recommendbooks.blogspot.in>

Nicky Mottram says

A very slow start, but story picked up a bit. Wasn't a riveting read, not sure whether I would read more by this author

Aditi says

According to National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), *every day 93 women are being raped in India.*

I know, being an Indian, it's not only a shocking information but also an embarrassing piece of data. Moreover, in my country, we do not celebrate Republic Day, instead, we celebrate "Rape-"public day. Likewise, an Indian author named, Kishwar Desai, has opened our eyes with her new novel, *The Sea of Innocence* that features the dark, grim and forgotten world of rape victims. Not only that she has even paid tribute to the 16th December, 2012 gang rape victim in Delhi- which happens to be the most horrific gang rape in the history of our country.

Synopsis:

Goa, south India. A beautiful holiday hideaway where hippies and backpackers while away the hours. But beneath the clear blue skies lies a dirty secret... Simran Singh is desperate for a break and some time away from her busy job as a social worker-come-crime investigator. And so the unspoilt idyll of Goa seems just the place - white beaches, blue seas and no crime. But when a disturbing video appears on her phone, featuring a young girl being attacked by a group of men, she realizes that a darkness festers at the heart of this supposed paradise. And when she discovers out that the girl is Liza Kay, a British teenager who has gone missing, she knows she must act in order to save her. But first Simran must break through the web of lies and dark connections that flourish on these beaches. Everyone, it seems, knows what has happened to the girl but no one is prepared to say. And when more videos appear, and Simran herself is targeted in order to keep her quiet, the paradise soon becomes a living nightmare.

This is the third book in the Simran Singh series. Having never read any other books from this series, didn't much matter to me, since in every series, the author comes up with an all new Simran Singh adventure.

Simran Singh, a social work living in Delhi with her adopted teenage daughter, receives an anonymous racy video of a young girl from her ex-lover, Amarjit, who is top-shot cop in Delhi, while holidaying with her daughter in the beach-lover's paradise of India, Goa. This embarks yet another thrilling and riveting adventure in Simran Singh's life.

But sadly, I've to confess that the book didn't click with me that much. Firstly, the book has got a very slow pace, and at times, I felt like things should really move faster, considering this is a mystery book, the mystery was not properly revealed or layered by the author, because of the narrative style which is at times very dull and going out-of-topic at times. I understand the author had paid tribute to the Delhi gang rape victim, but that doesn't mean that she have to include the details of gang rape victim in each and every conversation. Moreover, this is a fictional book, and the author have managed to made it like a non-fiction one. I mean while reading a fictional stories, no body wants factual data and statistics and what-to-do or what-not-to-do in our real lives in a fictional story,since it will mar the charm of the fictional story, and that's what happened in this book too.

Yes, the story was sensational, bone-chilling and jaw-droopingly shocking and an eye-opener for all Indians ans well as for international tourists visiting Goa. But the story-telling is not at all that interesting to keep us on-the-hook all the time.

Well, the characters were well-developed, but then once again, the characterization was not done with much required depth, since it's crime novel, and since there were too many characters, I felt that at least a few-lines of back-story was very much required to understand the primary characters, like Amarjit- he has a vital role in the whole story, but I really couldn't connect with him, he was more like a miss-and-blink guy in the whole story. The sister of Liza, another important character, vanished from the story all of a sudden and once again, there was no supporting story to understand her character. Yeah, I liked Simran and her demeanor, and she crossed me not only as a careful mother but also as a determined woman trying to justice with Liza's missing case.

Well, the story-line is may not be that good, but the author has portrayed a colorful and bright back-drop of Goa which is not only beautiful like some paradise but the author has also carefully painted the under-belly and the darkness of Goa, which is not only striking but also thoroughly vivid! And her intricate details about the beach-destination not simply transported me into that paradise, but I could almost feel the salty breeze on my skin! And reading this book, simply urged my interest to go and visit Goa.

Note: A must-read for all the international female tourists, who are planning to visit Goa in the near future. This book enlightens a lot about how a foreign tourist must behave while holidaying in Goa and if you want to learn about the cold hard truth behind rapes in India, then definitely grab a copy of this book!

Verdict: *Read it, only if you want to enjoy the carefree Goan lifestyle.*

Courtesy: *Thanks to the author, Kishwar Desai, for giving me an opportunity to read and review her book.*

Smita Beohar says

It was at a friends recommendation that I had picked Witness the Night (You can read Reema's review [here](#). I more or less agree with it) and liked it. Though I did feel that the ending of that book was a little abrupt but overall the content was very strong and moving. That is why when I received a request to review this book I grabbed the opportunity.

The blurb will remind you of the Scarlett Keeling case (you can google to know more about her). I had assumed that the book would be a rehash of that incident but I was taken by surprise when the protagonists mentions the case in the beginning and takes it as a reference point for the Liza Kay case. In fact the book becomes quite real when the protagonist Simran talks about the Delhi rape case and how it has affected her thinking. Of how she relates the disappearance of Liza with the insecurity she feels for her own daughter.

The book is Simran's journey of finding the truth about Liza and of getting justice for her. The book has its own flaws, there are loopholes in the investigation or the way the book wraps up but at the end of the day it is a good book to read because it shows you a murky reality. It shows us a side of Goa which is hard to believe but surely exists. It shows us a side of today's youth which is again hard to accept but sadly exists.

It is a good read which makes you cringe, think and contemplate. It reminds you of the horrific Delhi rape case and of the crime rampant against women. It reminds you that in this society if you are wearing a skirt you are asking for being raped!! And by smoking/ drinking etc you are actually handing over a open invitation to be raped. Mind you after all this; the truth is "you had asked for it". The book is very contemporary even in the terms of depicting how corruption is deeply rooted in our society & how easy it is for people with power to escape punishment for their deadliest deeds.

A must read if you like the genre where fiction meets reality & manages to shake you. Very few Indian authors try it and succeed so do give this a try.

Bree T says

Delhi social worker Simran Singh is having a much needed holiday with her adopted teenage daughter on the idyllic beaches of Goa in India. Both of them need this break, time to reconnect away from Simran's often demanding job. However the 10 or so days that she has set aside do not go as planned at all.

Simran receives a text message from her former lover Amarjit who works with the police. He sends her a video of a blonde girl in a bad situation with several other men. The blonde girl seems to be Liza Kay, a British teenager who has gone missing in Goa. Although Simran doesn't want to get involved, she knows that she cannot ignore the video, or the ones that come after it. Amarjit thinks that Simran is the best person to talk to Liza's sister, who was apparently travelling with her. He's worried that he's not getting all the information and because the local police are notoriously untrustworthy and often easily bribed, he thinks that Simran might be their best option.

Simran does choose to talk to Liza's sister and she finds herself more puzzled each time that she does so. It's clear that there's much more at play here than the simple disappearance of a British tourist and now Simran knows that she must see this case out to the bitter end. She sends her daughter back to her mother in Delhi and prepares to investigate, even though by doing so she will also be putting her life in grave danger. Everyone has seen the young girl but no one wants to speak – fear and distrust are everywhere. In this beautiful, idyllic setting of white sandy beaches and sparkling sea, Simran will find a society that is rotten to the core.

This is the third novel in the series about social worker Simran Singh but I didn't know that until I'd finished this book – there's a line in the acknowledgements that references it. I looked up the two previous books and they seem to deal primarily with issues that I had wondered about during reading this, namely how Simran came to adopt her daughter and her prior relationship with Amarjit. You can read this novel as a standalone with little trouble but I enjoy knowing a lot about backstory so I did find myself questioning things and wishing I knew connections. However reading this without reading any prior novels will certainly not change the impact of this book, particularly as Simran's daughter is only a small role and then the focus changes to the disappearance of Liza Kay.

Desai paints a grim picture of Goa, which is lauded as a tourist destination for its beautiful coastline, ancient buildings and laidback lifestyle. It's a popular place for both domestic and international tourists but this book explores the more seedy side to both male Goan and Indian attitudes towards women, something that is becoming more and more prevalent. The novel references greatly the brutal gang rape of a woman on a bus in India in December of last year, where the victim was so internally damaged from being brutalised with an iron bar that after numerous operations she lost nearly all of her intestine, which had been ripped out by one of her attackers with his bare hands. She died 13 days after the attack in Singapore, where she had been airlifted to receive more specialised treatment. It was a case that shocked and disgusted the entire world (including India itself) and this novel takes place during time of the gang rape and the aftermath where the victim's life hangs in the balance.

I have to say that one thing did frustrate me in the book and that was Simran's lack of confronting Liza's sister Marian over the obviously untrue things she told Simran and the fact that more than once she seemed to deliberately place Simran in danger even though later on she said that she didn't mean to. It seemed like Simran just blindly continued to meet with Marian and listen to what she said even though she knew that she was lying and that there was much more to Liza's disappearance than it first seemed. Marian was able to fob Simran off with the flimsiest pieces of information. I know Simran was desperate to find out what had happened to Liza, because she kept receiving videos of bad moments that the young girl had found herself in and she found herself emotionally involved. It just seemed like she didn't go about it in the smartest fashion. She also doesn't inform Amarjit of what's going on, which also seems lax.

I also did have a bit of a problem with the revealing videos because they just seemed entirely too convenient. It's very easy these days with technology to film things, even incriminating things but these were filmed from far away and often at night and randomly. There was an explanation for how all of this occurred but it was relatively flimsy and I think it detracted a little from the overall story.

Despite these two nitpicks I had with the story, I did enjoy this book. I don't read many books set in India and I don't think I've ever read anything set in Goa. Simran's job sounds incredibly interesting but also very depressing and she seems the type that always gets emotionally involved in the sense that she is unable to walk away, even from things don't concern her, such as this entire incident. She puts herself in danger time and time again to get to the bottom of what really happened to Liza Kay. She definitely is the sort of character that sees a job through (even an unofficial one!). I'd love to read more about her and I think I will try and find the two previous books in this series.

Giulia says

A sort of thriller with, as a gloomy background, the drug trafficking industry in the beaches of Goa. An Indian social worker is asked to discreetly investigate the disappearance of a beautiful young English woman (16 years old). The investigation takes terrible twists as the character tries to uncover the truth and gets to understand how politician, police, tourists service providers work in concert for smuggling drugs, sparing no efforts (rape, murders,...).

First of all, the style and the content is quite unequal. Secondly, the writer being a journalist but the book being fiction, you do not know what can be true and what is invented.

Third of all, several descriptions are very graphic and sensationalists, and when it is about rape and murder, it basically challenges me on a moral ground.

It definitely shows a very dark and scary picture of Goa!

Fleme Varkey says

It is not an easy topic to talk about now, leave alone read. Every day you have stories in the newspapers screaming about rape or abuse of some woman or the other. And the age limit shockingly is going lower and lower. From three-year-olds to even 60-year-olds, no age group has been spared the heinous abuse or horror of rape.

Kishwar Desai's latest book *Sea of Innocence* deals exactly with this topic. Desai's first book in the Simran Singh series, *Witness by Night* looks at honour killing and the second, *Origins of Love* explores surrogacy in the context of the urban-rural divide.

Simran Singh, the central character in the story, is desperate for a break and some time away from her busy job as a social worker-cum-crime investigator. And so the unspoilt idyll of Goa seems just the place — white beaches, blue seas and no crime. She heads over there with 16-year-old daughter Durga, thinking that paradise lies in Goa. But trouble follows her there as well, or rather is already there.

A colleague of hers, Amarjit (also an ex-flame) sends her a disturbing video of a young girl being molested by four men in a hotel and she seems to be smiling, putting up little resistance and then she goes missing. The girl in the video, Lisa Kay, has a sister, Marian, looking for her and Amarjit, despite Simran's emphatic

nos, asks her to help Marian.

Nothing in the beach town is as it seems. The beach changes colour everyday and so do those who make a living from it. Goa is a tourist's paradise, but it has now got the dubious name of being a rapist's paradise as well. Every year, a number of British and Russian nationals are found raped or murdered in this beach town.

Kishwar also refers to the Scarlett Keeling case, which landed a lot of bureaucrats and India in a lot of soup. The tone of this book is ominous and cautious and yet very saddening. The Delhi rape incident plays a prominent part in the book; references to the victim's helplessness and the brutality seem to jump out at every corner in the story.

The book digs up a lot which the government and authorities are trying to bury, hoping to sustain the false image of Goa. A haunt of the flower children, drugs like cocaine and marijuana seem to flow like wine there. The drug mafia has its roots so strongly entrenched that any investigation into its nexus is nipped in the bud.

Simran must break through the web of lies and dark connections that flourish on these beaches. Everyone, it seems, knows what has happened but no one is prepared to say. And when more videos appear, and Simran herself is targeted, the paradise becomes a nightmare.

Neena says

About beach life, crime in Goa
