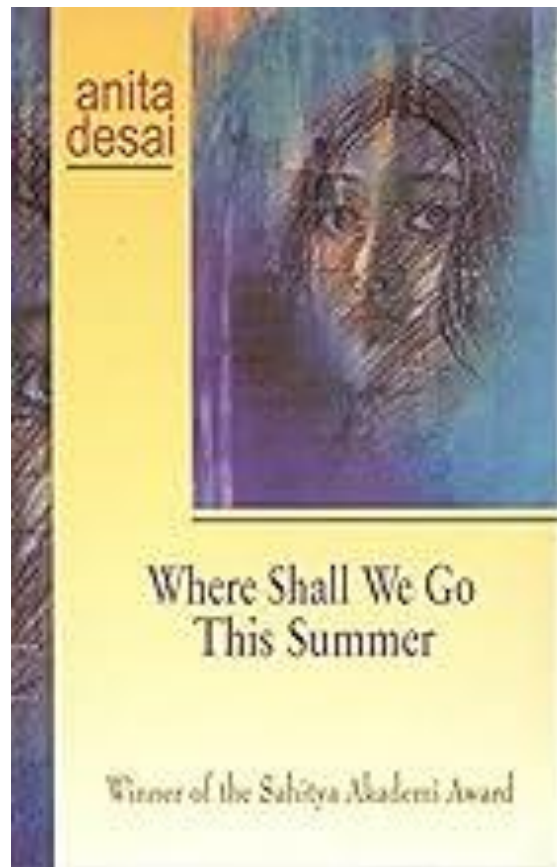


**Examining the Interplay of Reality and Illusion in  
Anita Desi's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?***

**Maneesha M, II M.A. English  
D. Pradeek, Assistant Professor**

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Courtesy: [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**Abstract**

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is Anita Desai's fourth novel. This novel was published in 1988. Anita Desai is an Indian expatriate writer. Her writings have been nominated for the Booker Prize three times. Anita Desai introduced psychology to Hindi and English literature. She stated that she has always been interested in expressing women's emotions in her stories. *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* is a woman-themed novel. Here, the novelist describes the bad mood of the heroine, Sita. Sita is tired of all the tricks of city life. She is depressed and lives alone due to marital conflict. Sita swings like a pendulum between reality and illusion. This article tries to find Sita's psychological problems by examining the novel. The main theme is to show Sita's conflict between reality and imagination.

**Keywords:** Anita Desai, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?*, Reality, Illusion, Psychological, Artificialities, Disharmonious

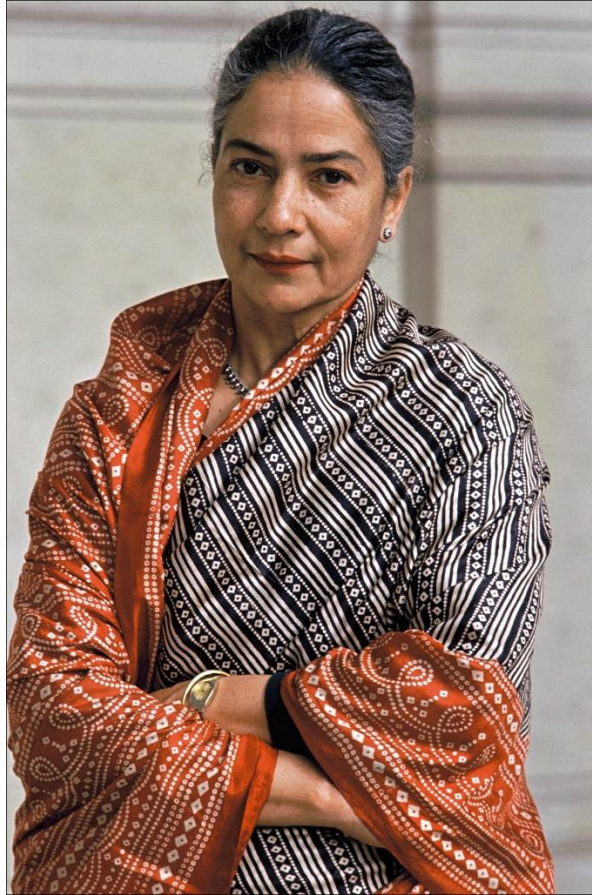
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Anita Desai

Courtesy: <https://orlando.cambridge.org/people/6a63527e-61b0-47f9-8b51-e51e9ae3605f>

## Introduction

Anita Desai is a prolific writer from India. She is one of the best female novelists of English literature in post-colonial India. She was rewarded with a world record. Anita Muzumdar was born on June 24, 1937, in Mussoorie, India. Her father is Dina Nath Mazumdar, a Bangali, and her mother is Antoinette Nime Mazumdar, a housewife of German origin. Anita Desai grew up in a home where he learned Bengali, Hindi, and German. She published her first

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story at the age of nine. Desai herself said, “I first learned English when I was at school; it was the first language I learned to read and write, so it became my language.” Anita Desai studied in India and started working at Max Muller Bhawan in Calcutta. She later worked at other institutions and eventually attended MIT as the John E. Emerita. Burchard Professor of Humanities. Desai is married to Ashvin Desai, a well-known businessman in Kolkata.

Anita Desai boldly entered the world of fiction with her novel *Cry the Peacock* in 1963, and all readers were amazed by her talent. She has written more than a dozen books since then. Desai competed for the Booker Prize three times, in 1980, 1984, and 1999, with her works *Bright Daylight on Watch*, *Fasting Feasting*, and *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* In 1980, Desai received the Sahitya Academy Award for her work, *In Custody*. Desai is a member of the Royal Society of Literature. Desai has received many awards for her work: *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* (1975), *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971), *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), *Clear Light of Day* (1980), *In* (1984), *Voices in the City* (1965), *Fasting Feasting* (1999), etc.

Anita Desai focuses on exploring the female soul in all her novels. It goes without saying that all her novels are women centred. All her heroines are in stressful situations, sometimes from her own creation, sometimes from relatives, and sometimes from the stories Desai told while growing up.

*Where Shall We Go This Summer?* Is the heart-touching story of middle-aged pregnant Sita, who does not want to give birth to her fifth child in today’s judgmental and confused world. Instead, Sita wishes to leave her womb and travel to the island of her inheritance, hoping

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for a miracle. *The Times of India* commented on this novel as “skillfully dramatised. The story lies perilously between myth and reality.” Sita, a wife and mother, is torn between harsh reality and fantasy when she decides to give birth to her unborn child. This article examines the novel and focuses on Sita’s problems and consequences.

## Objectives

1. To explain the elements of both reality and illusion in the novel.
2. To reveal the conflict between reality and illusion.
3. To evaluate how the author deals with the stressful environment of the novel.

## Research Methodology

The selected problems are related to the literature, so both primary and secondary data are collected from literary sources. The methodology used is primarily analytical and descriptive.

Desai’s novel, *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* presents the female protagonist, Sita, as a very sensitive and neurotic woman. Sita loses her identity as Raman’s wife and mother of four children. She is tired of giving birth and raising children. She is pregnant again with her fifth child, and the whole story is due to that fifth child that is yet to be born. Sita does not want to give birth to her fifth child. Instead, she wants to keep it carefully in her stomach. Sita announces her pregnancy to her husband with “highly paranoid rage, fear, and rebellion.” Sita’s

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husband assures her that everything will be fine. Raman hopes that Sita will soon get rid of her illness and enjoy her pregnancy period like in her previous issues. But she is shocked to see him frowning, twisting his fingers, and smoking bitterly at night, showing pain. When Raman asks her if she wants an abortion, Sita says that she wants to keep it. Raman tries to comfort her, and Sita decides to go to Manori Island in hope of some miracle that will help her keep her baby unborn but safe inside her womb. Sita says, she will go to the island, and it will be different. Raman asks her if expecting some miracles on the island is possible. Sita replied that she was sure of that on the island of her childhood. Sita believes that Manori Island has black magic. According to Sita, Manori is an enchanting island of wonders.

In fact, as a child, Sita experienced a miracle that happened on the island. Sita's father is the one who holds her magical powers. Sita lives in a fantasy world even now. Sita recalls memories of her childhood and how her father treated these people from the continent. People called his treatments "wonder drugs." Sita remembers how a fisherwoman ran and fell at her feet, saying that her dam was healed. Sita remembers how another fisherman got Phoolmaya pregnant and brought so many gifts to her father. Once he cured a child bitten by scorpions, and the child's mother told the villagers that he had performed magic. The villager believed that he knew the magic that would remove death from all creatures. All the strange experiences and feelings on the island made Sita think that there was a miracle on the island.

Sita's mind is haunted by illusions from her childhood. She now desires to go back to Missouri and await miracles. Sita is sure of some miracle that will help her keep the baby in

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*Summer?*

her womb. She does not want to give birth to her child in a corrupt and artificial world. Sita's husband, a very practical person, does not support her and asks her to give up such a foolish idea. Despite her husband's displeasure, Sita goes to Manori Island with one daughter and her youngest son.

The author has beautifully revealed Sita's psyche. She saw safety and protection in the illusion of the island. It would magically keep her baby safe from birth. Sita is sure that Manori will surely bless her with some miracles. Her childhood was no longer a part of her life on the Manori, which is completely surprising. It does not appeal to her as before. She did not give up hope, though. Sita tries to adapt to the limited resources and opportunities found on the island. But her children find it impossible and show their displeasure.

The monsoon made their lives on the island much more miserable. Children blame her for all their misfortunes. They are waiting for their mother to realise that there is life in their house in Bombay City and her so-called "escape" to the island, which is madness. Every day, Sita waits patiently for some magic, but nothing new happens. Sita stands confused. She is searching for the magic island that she has promised herself. It was now buried behind the gentle grey-green Mildew of the monsoon, if it had ever existed at all—black, glittering, and dazzling as in her memory. Sita became used to her calm, semi-conscious, and dreamy life on the island.

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She never felt alone. The island, the sea, the palms, and the house are his companions. They are so alert that sometimes they speak to her. She assures her unborn child that she will keep him safe inside. Suddenly, Sita came to know that Raman's arrival on the island made her feel a violent throbbing of grief within her. Sita initially refuses to return to Bombay. She has many reasons not to return to the mainland.

Finally, she realises that she cannot escape reality and decides to get back with her husband. While packing for the return trip, Sita's mind is full of different thoughts.

The author uses the stream of consciousness technique to reveal his psyche. He writes: "As soon as he got home, he had to pack himself, then pack a suitcase full of baby clothes... He could see the expressionless faces of the night nurses in the women's ward. Then, after a baby was born, facing the shoulders of..." The novel is a skillful dramatisation of an inner conflict where the female protagonist dares to say the great 'No'. There comes a day for certain people. When it comes time to give the big yes or no.

## Conclusion

Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* describes the thoughts and feelings of two lovers, Sita, and Raman. Misunderstandings and impatience frequently impede the normal flow of thinking among lovers, who typically have poor mental flows. The main theme of the novel is Sita's hatred and humiliation at the birth of her fifth child. She knows the joy of motherhood and finds satisfaction. But she has been emotionally scarred in recent years. She

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was worried that different nurses and doctors would criticise him. That's why she tried to escape from this problem.

Here, it is impossible to escape from the present to the past because the past is dead. But it exists now, and its existence is undeniable. So, where should we escape? **Where Shall We Go This Summer?** The only answer is: don't go anywhere. There's nowhere to go, but now, are you alive? Everyone must find this out for himself or herself; there is no real medicine.

The question in the title has a beautiful meaning: Live in the moment, wherever you are. From the above observations, it can be seen that the main cause of Sita's neurosis was her inability to understand and tolerate difficult situations in life. This implicit difference prepares us for Sita's rejection, because the final analysis of the novel seems to be about Sita's rejection—the rejection of her feelings. Sita's dreams of escaping the circle of knowledge are constantly shattered by the intrusion of the reality from which she is desperate to escape.

Sita has said a great no to her duties and responsibilities. She has escaped from order and routine, from life and the city to the island. Sita has refused to say when they must say the great yes or the great no. She escaped order and routine, life, and cities to an island. Sita refused to give birth to her fifth child, instead keeping him safely inside her womb. The final part of the novel explains how Sita accepts the fact that no miracle can save her child from birth. In the end, the author correctly states that reality dominates illusions, and the novel ends with Sita

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accepting reality and returning to a normal life. Thoughts, ideas, emotions, and reasons are at the centre of all of Anita Desai's stories.

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