

Anita Desai's "The Farewell Party" and Small Town India

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The Farewell Party is organized by Bina and her husband Raman prior to leaving their small town on transfer to the metropolitan Bombay. It is not a party thrown for them by others to bid good-bye. By suppressing the name of the town, Anita Desai has tried to universalize such parties and the lives of the Anglicized upper-middle class Indians living in the smaller towns that dot our nation. The sprawling barbed-wire lawn which provides the setting would be conspicuous by its absence in the metro, but the barbs of society would be perhaps more sophisticated and stinging. Bina drinks freely to confirm liberated attitudes and tries to show off because she knows once they leave there would be no gossip to bother her ears. Her eldest child was a spastic and therefore she tries to devote her time for the general welfare at the 'local hospital'. Bina was reasonably well known in the town and it is in this context that the ending becomes poignant because tears emerge in the eyes of the guests and the hosts, none of whom knew each other intimately. Alienation is the central theme of this short-story. Marx understood alienation in terms of modes of production and was deeply concerned about the pathetic condition of the labour, blaming the bourgeoisie and the capitalists for their sorrows and sufferings. In "The Farewell Party" it is the bourgeoisie that are the victims and Marx did not have much sympathy to spare for them or their shabby thinking that had led to their own self-victimization as a class. Among the guests a hierarchy prevails and not even in a drunken state do they forget their status, the women's position being governed by their husband's rank and company. The Commissioner and his wife enjoy a very high status and lost in her airs Mrs. Roy, the wife, is not even aware how many years the Ramans had spent in the small town. This all important couple is too obsessed with itself and Bina and Raman were insignificant for them to remember the details. The life of the Ramans during their stint in the small town was uneventful, generally small enjoyments and illnesses of growing children. Bina dislikes proud people but was herself capable of being snooty, coldly appraising and cutting folks down to size. Bose from the museum and the history professor and their wives appear less glamorous, a bit pathetic, and instead of drawing respect become objects of pity in front of business executives and their spouses. The humble Bose keeps showering praises on Bina and this brings the lady closer to him. Most women despite their pretentious behavior abstained from drinking, from carrying their extravagances too far due to the fear of being castigated in a basically traditional set up. Women always play the second fiddle in the party to their husbands and are conscious of the social mores or the unwelcome gifts of tradition. Along with the men folk they are also conscious about their financial limitations which are not too pressing but they are all the same. The guests in "The Farewell Party" are like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle that has refused to be solved and they thrive on one-up-manship and subtle societal games against each other. Remy Martin was a prized possession and Vat 69 scotch whiskey was in short supply during the seventies and the eighties because India was following a policy of socialism. The urge to copy the life style of the colonials is over-powering in all those who were partying, 'mimicry' as Homi Bhabha would describe it in postcolonial parlance.

The narrative flows like the booze at the farewell party, works smoothly on us, and just as after we are through with drinking the short story over-powers us with its strong intoxication for the resonances continue to ring in our minds long after it is over. The prolonged hangover persists and nags consistently, provoking us to think all the more. Virginia Woolf was one of the earliest and most potent influences on Anita Desai and it is the stream of consciousness technique, the minimum manipulation of the narrative for a neat well made story, visible in the short story that leaves us wondering, sunk in the subtle conversations of the characters that return and re-return in our imagination repeatedly. Anita Desai's major concern were women and her women are never simple minded but complex characters who do not fit the clearly defined feminist bill; round characters who challenge the flat stereotypes, defeat the predictable moulds. All the women who combine to make the farewell party a clever exercise in luxuriousness are smart and crafty, by their example unwittingly encourage others to learn the tricks of the trade and those of a cross-section of the small society on the verge of affluence by Indian standards, inflict pain on themselves by attempting to seek greater happiness, thwarted by none other than their own so called friends, in this mundane world. Feminists have argued that the worlds of work and leisure pre-existed them and that instead of being guided merely by common sense they need to question. In the farewell party implicit is social power and it is exercised not only on the denizens of the small town society but works among the guests themselves for each woman is treated according to the status of her husband and never as an individual human being in her own right. Chris Weedon says that "regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations" (Weedon 108) has to be examined more from the women's point of view. In the party the women for all their chirpiness and even bitchiness play second fiddle to their husbands and do not question their secondary position in the scheme of things.

Raman belonged to the social elite of the small town but he found their ways artificial, fastidious, lacking genuineness of thought and feeling. He felt marginalized within this pseudo circle which claimed him as one of their own because his was a totally Indian company and not one of those high paying transnational ones with foreign collaborations. The cigarettes that his company manufactured enjoyed a big market share yet his companions looked down upon them: good business wasn't enough because shades of colonialism and imperialism had made a lasting impression on their mature minds. Everything that happened in the society in which Bina and Raman moved was characterized by smoothness and finesse, be it bitching or back-biting, or partying with mahjong, bridge and golf. Raman felt side lined because the slick intrigues were too much to bear for him and often it got personal to the extent that his spastic child also became a part of the polished attempts to demolish him socially for perverse pleasure. His withdrawing within his own self had made him to go on long walks and indulge in quaint hobbies. He parties hard and guzzles down liquor to catch up with men and women who had made him 'a social pariah'. Knowing fully well that his was a transfer to Bombay and not a promotion, he ironically gets congratulated for being promoted. In polite and supercilious circles this is both courtesy and a jibe, at once. The flippant conversation veers from one subject to another, from public school days to golf at the Willingdon Club—as though they had been together

when it all happened. Willingdon Club was started in 1855 at Coonoor by British army officers and with the passage of time civilians and Indians were gradually accepted as members. Later clubs on similar lines were started in Chennai, Bombay etc. and today it stands for anglophilism, social prestige and sports, including golf. Anita Desai takes a dig at the education system while she describes the merry makers frivolities because such shallow people got invited to deliver convocation addresses at colleges also – got opportunities to talk publicly about the state of the society with pomposity even though they were, at the core, hallow men, poor examples for the impressionable minds. The lawn under the lights put up to make the party more fastidious is compared to a dark liquid and the entire place with the revelers to an aquarium with queer fish in it. Anita Desai in her fiction always tried to focus on the women more and in this short-story we find them complimenting and simulating all that was expected from their husbands. It is social climbing and not any kind of authentic self-hood that pre-occupies them. It is the dogged pursuit of material success along with their spouses and not the fulfillment of any inner compulsions that drives them. It is interesting to note that such educated, painted and diamond-studded butterflies were initially at the vanguard of the feminist movement that came from the west. These socialites cum bourgeoisie feminists were happy to interpret freedom as license. Insensitivity and claiming of dignity which most of the guests were totally unworthy of resulted in what Homi K. Bhabha calls ‘narcissistic identifications’ with the colonials. This disturbing obsession with the colonials made all the characters farcical and even cruel towards each other because of the self-importance that their false westernization generated within them.

The sophisticated under cutting that was going on at the farewell party was primarily a creation of capitalism as we had inherited via colonialism. This colonized version of capitalism expected its dehumanized machinery to work in the colonies through fair means and foul, and the greasing was done by making contacts even if it meant spoiling and straining human relations. Company profit and a slice of the cake was the mantra that everyone had to follow under pressure. It was professionalism at its lowest and meanest for the families too became involved in this slippery competition for survival. The aquarium is a central motif in the short story and the entire gathering is compared to the fishes in it. The lawn and the trees complete the metaphor because to make the fishes comfortable water plants are also kept inside the aquarium. Fishes of different color, sizes and shapes – even behavioral patterns may be found in an aquarium just as there are different people in the party. The Commissioner and his wife being the biggest ones – demand the maximum space and attention. Mrs. D’Souza, who was making her debut at a cocktail party, is described as ‘another recognizable fish’ who ‘swims’ in the direction of Bina being the humblest of the lot. The lawn appears ‘liquescent’, much like the water of the aquarium at night. If we extend the image of fishes further, we can also say that the intentions of the guests were not plain nor were they what they would be normally expected to be i.e. provide a warm send-off to the hosts, but fishy. They try to fish in troubled waters because when contact making went on others object and obstruct slyly and even when side-tracking was practiced with cunningness it did not prevent them from proceeding further in their adventurous business. The sick joke being that the hosts under transfer were also a part of the clever

enterprise along with their guests, speaking against other with 'conspiratorial smoothness'.

Anita Desai, when she assumes her strong authorial voice, compares the farewell party with a party on a ship night before the journey ends when people have a rollicking time together without restraint because they are not likely to meet each other later, go their own ways. Everybody in the farewell party is graded and categorized according to their place in the social ladder, neighbors are treated as casual friends with plenty of empty endearments. The banter under the influence of drinks and cocktails swings from dogs to the infatuation that a guest's boy has for Bina's daughter. Music loving children contribute to the flirtations of the elders, add pep and draw attention to themselves in the party with their naïve demands. The party comes to an end on a hierarchical note too and the Commissioner and his wife are the first to be seen off, followed by other social superiors of Bina and Raman. There is plenty of hugging and kissing, wordy display of emotions and diamonds are also flaunted at the same time. Bina and Raman relax emotionally when the late comers, the two doctors, arrive from the hospital because they were the ones who knew well about their most raw nerve: the spastic child. The unblushing truth beneath the surface of such glib parties is revealed after Tagore's song is sung. The host and the last guests try to be warm but the affectedness in their behavior does not really come to an end: they were acquaintances not friends before the party and remain so when it ends. There is some show of emotions, sentiments do surface but then under the influence of liquor the truth refuses to hide itself despite the resistant strong persona. They are relieved that the farewell party is over and there is also a feeling of boredom because all said and done it was a gathering of outsiders, as Albert Camus would call them, folks who were deep down alien to each other. There is regret because all of them were aware in their heart of hearts that they had been feigning throughout, it was all a sham — that the unreal howsoever suave it may be can never be a substitute for a genuine meeting and hearty partying of true minds. Heidegger alleged that alienation was primarily 'fallen understanding'. He felt that idle talk and empty conversations were responsible for alienation because most people in their everyday lives accept the common view which is inauthentic. Asking the right questions was the answer to alienation and uncomfortable questions were being avoided by the party celebrants. Life itself had been mindlessly accepted at its face value and no need was felt for anything deeper by the guests and the hosts. Life was being lived with gusto in the fast track together with its pin-pricks and that was it.

Bina's carefulness with the minor details of the party and the stress present in her mind to impress the guests with her arrangements shows how utterly self-conscious she was and keen to impress those of them who were considered the right kind of people. In the dark moonless night the lawn appears 'inky', this contributes towards strengthening the metaphor of the 'aquarium' that Anita Desai uses in the short story. The liquid imagery is reinforced when she compares her acquaintances, with a drink in hand, to water, ruminates on how cool and complacent they were about their lot in life like still water. Her drink too shakes and spills over a little from her glass symbolizing the little storms that were inevitable in everyone's journey on this planet. Bina while thinking on these lines appears almost 'faceless' and therefore represents

the author's opinion about the guests and those of the others who observe the make-up of this society – its upper crust. Both, the ladies and gentlemen, with their prepared faces and in their finery possess 'the coolness but not the weight of water'. The pointer shows how callow and shallow these affluent folks were essentially, their personalities being devoid of gravity and substance. The intention of Anita Desai is to draw attention of the readers who get impressed by superficialities and display of wealth, which too may rather be limited, in a primarily poor society. These heavy weights of a small town society, who set themselves to party in a lighter mood, were wet behind their ears; at pains to flaunt their westernization, were completely unmindful of the revelation of their intellectual and cultural slavery. This short story was written by Anita Desai when barely two and a half decades had passed since India had become a republic and decolonization was high on the political agenda. Bhabha has argued that mimicry was subversive towards the colonials but he fails to highlight the self-destructive possibilities that it could entail for the practitioners of mimicry; here the guests themselves. Higher the degree of identification with the colonial masters, more callous, ridiculous, vicious, and grotesque inside the mask of civility and culture that they wore became the party celebrants.

Bina has been described as a 'frigid and friendless woman'. This shows how pathetic she was deep down within herself because the rules of existence in the society to which they belonged were smoothly savage and cruel for her – and she stuck to this very social segment, to which most of her corporate ilk belonged, because it was influential and was thought of highly in the town. She might have been just about as abrasive as the others were had her eldest child not been a spastic and her husband's company had not been solely Indian. She is made by fate, chance and destiny to hate the very things she liked – partying hard over bridge and golf or making appearances at charity shows with the big people of the small town because a quirk of fate had them pushed back in life. The scope for Raman to rise and change his company was always there but the spastic child had no chance of doing well. Bina's presence and dignity of bearing could easily be trampled by the norms of success society that does not even wish to understand anything other than success and does not make any concessions for anyone for any reason. Bina knew this too well and could do little to surmount this difficulty because the root cause lay in her ill luck: 'the weight of the totally dependent child'. (Desai 84)

Bina has had a tough time in the small town managing her family and life. Four children and one of them an unacknowledged burden ungrudgingly borne! The cares required of the woman had made her miserable and yet she wishes to celebrate the passing of five painful years with her husband and other supposedly important people. Bina knew that the sentiments of glittering members of the society they had cultivated over the years were spurious and yet she does not mind when the Commissioner's wife was faking affection for her and Raman. The Commissioner's wife has been satirized by Anita Desai rather strongly, she has so much talcum powder on her shoulders that it gets blown off into Bina's nose and she sneezes. The over-powdered Commissioner's wife recognizes the boredom of existence in a small town and the consequential need for decent friends to make life a little more bearable. Being high-strung she does not bother to take cognizance of the time that Bina had to devote to her

spastic child and other children, is annoyed with her for not joining in to make the Red Cross fair for charity a success. She does not express her displeasure in so many words; for her cold silence is enough to send the unpleasant message to Bina. Established in 1863, the International Red Cross works for the welfare of those suffering as a consequence of war and natural disasters. Florence Nightingale is credited with being one of its prime movers. The Commissioner's wife doesn't bother about anyone very much because she is conscious of her commanding position. Bina suffers the moods of Mrs. Roy, the Commissioner's wife, a little bit but would not allow the company wives to easily take liberties with her nor would she allow anyone to come too close to Mrs. Roy because she didn't like the idea of people getting mixed up with her contacts or coming in-between her and the object of her cultivation. She smirks at Renu because she got a big hug from Mrs. Roy and this is indication enough for Renu to keep off from the influential bureaucrat's wife. Bina and her hubby are leaving the small town yet she resents Renu's encroaching and poaching on Mrs. Roy. Bina handles Renu with scorn to prove her social position and clout in influential small town folk circuit. In a way almost all the party members are birds of passage, apart from Mrs. D'Souza, the History Professor and Bose, yet they practice their cleverness on each other with finesse. She notices that the somberness in Bose's morose personality represented the seriousness brought about by being paid low wages at the local museum for a prolonged period of time. A certain lack of humor and brightness in the personality of Bose gives himself away as belonging to an 'underpaid culture' where shortages and economic worries were the defining features and took the sprightliness away. Bose's personality is dissected at a place where the pursuit of Mammon was the undisputed goal of almost all and he could not have lived up to their standards anyway. He was someone who was meant to be used and thrown away and perhaps he too did not mind it because in the bargain he got some handsome invitations to parties that he would never be able to host himself. Poor chap keeps paying compliments unnecessarily to Bina and she casually allows her ego to feed on him. He too was a connection, one that came handy in grooming children better and in return for small favors that Bina showered on him, he would ask her to judge the children's competitions organized at the museum. The act of judging the children's competition gave Bina some social prominence which she had enjoyed and cursed at the same time for it took her time to finish the job.

Drinking was and is still encouraged at parties in inhibited India because, apart from being an indication of westernization, it indicates intimacy and closeness. The Commissioner was the highest ranking government servant and even in postcolonial India the colonial system of administration functions. Therefore, it was Mr. Roy who wielded the maximum amount of power and authority and not the well heeled business executives. By entertaining him and his wife together with themselves they were gaining proximity to the local center of power through drinking. It was by using Roy and his influence that many of them improved their business prospects and got rid of hindrances. To be seen mixing and drinking with him was a message to the townsmen to beware. Among business executives also matters were settled over a glass of whiskey and drinking was not merely something to flaunt socially. The lower middle-class and lower class people criticized and envied such activities. News about such parties within a short time traveled across the small town and gossip started but the message

always was that they were influential people, men who mattered in the town's life and were its leading lights. In this sense, it was through these lavish parties that the prevailing social order perpetrated and maintained itself and established its superiority over the poor. Hegel argued that human beings spiritually progress in life from ignorance to self-understanding and stumbling blocks result in the development of alienation. Self-estrangement among human beings according to Hegel resulted in the debasement of human nature and it often ended up in the negation of cherished human values. This is exactly what we notice in the guests in the farewell party and even charity is indulged for the sake of making appearances. For this Hegel would blame materialism and the resultant moral breakdown in society as we see in "The Farewell Party". There is no genuine concern for each other and in the rat race for success and material accomplishments dehumanization leads them to attack each other verbally on the sly. Raman, the host, becomes a 'social pariah' in the society he moves.

That the party should have ended on a regretful note was a forgone conclusion. All such parties ended this way but they continued because all said and done the socialites were essentially human beings that crave to be gregarious, come together and share, find a watering hole where they can have some pleasure together. The act was an emotional necessity and filled up a void within, killed boredom and tediousness of existence in a small town. There was no rancor or animosity among the guests, just personality clashes which are common among ordinary mortals belonging to all cross-sections of all societies because human beings are born with egos. It is the ego which explains the personality clashes and divisions among the guests, and drinking brings about an instinctual bonhomie and joy though for short while. The ego among the guests wasn't strong enough to prevent them from coming together. Also, there was not much company available in the small town to choose from, especially because the ladies and gentlemen were class-conscious and anglicized. The company was like a fragrant rose that has to be accepted with its thorns. And to lean on one rose for succor and pleasure, another rose must put up with the thorns of that rose as well. Being human they had realized that there was no option before them but to accept each other with their failings as it happens with one's near and dear ones. Kierkegaard assigned the growth of alienation to the growth of ambiguity concerning the nature of reality and truth and the resultant growth of subjective thoughts. He also felt that most people do not realize the inevitability of death. Kierkegaard argued that if people were to become aware of the ultimate reality, death, then they would turn to God naturally and overcome alienation. In his opinion 'death denial' was the most important reason behind alienation and that one should not merely live for one's pleasures as Raman's guests did. Kierkegaard also emphasized the necessity of developing a culture of the spirit which would lead to the development of our consciousness and self-knowledge to prevent alienation and the traumas that emanate from it. In "The Farewell Party" the reality created by the guests itself was jaundiced, a lie as Naipaul would call it, and thriving on it meant inflicting the subtle and deep pains of alienation. Whatever was supposed to be the existential truth, it was at the core falsehood.

Children make their presence felt in the adult world and are generally dismissed lightly as being insignificant which they are not. The success of the children in life enhances the social prestige of the parents and their wining prizes makes their

guardians feel on top of the world so much so that they would look down upon those members of this elite society whose kids did not excel. The promise of a bright future for the children was important in the adult world. Children were also supposed to be westernized and the parents took pains to inculcate the prevailing western culture, as it was understood in India, in them so that they may appear up-to-date. It is never western culture per se but western culture as it was supposed to be in Indian eyes. Beatles and Chubby Checkers provide the much needed entertainment because the adults too shared their interest in music and dance. The Beatles was the English rock group that started in Liverpool in 1960 consisting of Paul McCartney, Ringo Starr, George Harrison and John Lennon. They visited India in 1968 and spent some time at Rishikesh with Mahesh Yogi whom they adopted as their spiritual Guru. Chubby Checkers was a black American song writer and singer credited with having popularized the twist dance. The choice of the latest pop music also indicates and contributes to the building up of the anglicized atmosphere of the party. The music being the 'latest' gives us a clue about the historical period in which the story is situated. The hidden message was that Bina and Raman's children were well up with the latest popular music coming out of England and America, therefore, more westernized and fashionable as compared to the others, cut above the ordinary. As parents they promoted such activities among their children and fervently desired that their tastes would remain more modish as compared to the others. Popular Bollywood songs would have made the party environment sub-standard, lower middle-class. All those partying were class-conscious and wanted everything to be classy. Things Indian were praised sky high in keeping with the patriotic sentiments but in practice it was the colonial episteme that manifested itself in their behavioral patterns and taste. This is what being politically correct meant to this liquor guzzling group of fat pursed party animals who were right on top of the small town echelons.

Sartre was an atheist and he described alienation as 'bad faith'. All human beings, Sartre believed, were destined to create their own meanings and values in life. This freedom to create one's own values is not an easy one because then as human beings become solely responsible for our actions, successes and failures. Very frequently people cannot exercise this freedom to make a choice properly and in this failure lies their alienation. Alienation becomes worse when people start blaming their mistakes on determinism and lack of intellectual freedom due to subversive discourses. Very often our anxieties and alienation are the outcome of our acceptance of those values and practices which we dislike or like because of superficial reasons. The worst kind of mental stress is borne by those people who can neither accept nor reject social values that are current. Bina and Raman along with their guests were indulging in a party which likely to become an ordeal as one such 'disastrous' occasion had become five years ago. The hosts and the guests were into it and yet not quite because they knew that it would become a fiasco after the mirth and embraces with 'conspiratorial smoothness'. The signs of the boisterous and frolicsome affair becoming despicable were obvious when the merry making was going on.

Heavy partying also became the training ground for children, for they often try to take after their parents, especially if they are successful. Kids do not drink yet they put on a 'tipsy' act on soft drinks and boys swank and strut like the men folk, pose to

be 'experienced party guests'. The girls and boys prance about arrogantly in imitation of the adults with loads of pride, masquerade as sophisticated adults and pose as though they are also big-wigs. Left to themselves they would have helped themselves to hard drinks even. Anita Desai describes this as a 'a party within a party' because the children's world is essentially like the adult world, a miniature replica struggling to grow in size. However, being kids they generously help themselves to snacks to such an extent that the passage of the waiters has to be rerouted. Anita Desai does not miss out on the young siblings and her sharp eyes also point towards the babies who were crying for the attention of their parents while the party was in full swing. Mrs. D' Souza who taught Bina's daughter was invited but her shabby looks encourage the hostess to look down upon her and rethink if by inviting the poor teacher they had made a mistake. Mrs. D' Souza's presence was likely to make Bina's daughter Tara happy and improve her prospects in school also. The old school tie and the years spent at the public schools figure in the adult talk for going to these public schools was a part of the snobbery and places where contacts were made between siblings of the rich people. The 'Cindrella's ball-like atmosphere' shows that deep down the adults had not outgrown their kindergarten days, their strings were still attached to the dream-world of the unconscious. The friendships with neighbors were often formed because of the children. Drinking and merry making did not take the parents off from their kids. One parent keeps worrying about his son's examinations throughout the party and how the poor child would fare the next morning after a late night out with the parents. Anxiety about the examinations and children becoming irritable does not prevent the parents from continuing together till late into the night and when they decide to finally leave some children had already fallen asleep, put on their pyjamas.

Tagore's saddest songs build the climax of the farewell party, bring emotions into play. Drinking and partying had made the atmosphere flippant and showy, the parting was taken by the guests and the hosts in their stride – as something regular without any sense of loss, as though Bina and Raman's successors would be just about as good or bad, as though they were easily replaceable, as simply as partners in an ordinary game of bridge. Life had to be lived and enjoyed, and it would continue in much the same way in the small town with the names and faces changing. The party was a gathering of socialites and deep attachments were absent. The words of the song that Mrs. Bannerji sang are common and could be found in folk songs that women sing in different languages all over India; the sentiments sung were universal. Often it is the newly married bride that sings of such emotions. Here it is for Bina, Raman and their family for they do not know what to expect in Bombay, the presumption being that the small town was home. Being humans they were bound to be heavy hearted but somewhere they were pleased with themselves for some semblance of affection had come up for them. No where do Raman and Bina express any sense of loss whether at the beginning or during the farewell party that they had themselves kindly hosted and in defiance of the custom honored their guests instead of allowing their friends to honor them. Perhaps, it would not be too hazardous to say that Bina and Raman had tried to honor themselves and in the bargain strengthen some connections, make them long lasting. The weak bonds between the guests and the hosts, those who were there to bid farewell and those who were leaving make the

relationships enigmatic and business-like – convert the farewell party into a symbolic act devoid of any meaning at the core.

Naipaul speaks thus about his own plight as a fiction writer:

This new fiction was about colonial shame and fantasy, a book, in fact, about how the powerless lie about themselves, and lie to themselves, since it is their only resource. The book was called *The Mimic Men*. And it was not about mimics. It was about colonial men mimicking the condition of manhood, men who had grown to distrust everything about themselves. (Naipaul 193)

Anita Desai never dared to enter the real Indian milieu about which Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Munshi Prem Chand wrote with great insight and was happy to speak about the upper middle-class India that shamelessly imagines itself as successor to the British Raj, its practices and culture without in the least embarrassment or feeling of being fake. She wrote and unpacked insights not for ordinary folks who can read English but for those who can pay for expensive books brought out by publishers having their offices in the Anglo-American metropolitan cities. Problems regarding achievement of authentic selfhood do not bother the guests and money made them comfortable, encouraged them to see themselves as superiors in a poor society. Nativism was frowned upon and Gandhi, who was declared the father of the Indian nation, was rejected for espousing abstinence and spirituality in the service of the down trodden. Social service was practiced to make the right impact in the society as prominent citizens for social climbing. Those of them who practiced mimicry were not in the least remorseful about bossing over and crushing those below them and being crafty for promotions and subservient towards higher ups in the transnational corporations they worked for or hoped to work in. The sense of power that they enjoyed was deep down a sign of weakness – the supposed masculinity, mettle and power were hollow, impotent and ambiguous. This phenomenon can be described as reinvention of *thuggee* and the short-story as being about the inner suffering of those who practice it with elan, western style. "The Farewell Party" is precisely about colonial shame and fantasy that Naipaul refers to because the guests imagined themselves as successors to the white men who had officially left India and after their departure had become the stuff of dreams for those whom Vittachi described as the 'brown sahibs'. The brown sahibs imagined themselves as Englishmen and the shame lay in their trying to copy the colonials. For those of them who failed to become English in their own eyes to a very high degree it was a matter of great regret. Pretensions and lies defined them and they did not hesitate in circulating their own notions about themselves among the people to appear superior in public. It was the total acceptance of colonial superiority and their personal imaginative failure that drove these people to copy their former colonial masters. Such people had not stood up against the colonials nor were they capable of doing this because they wanted to become like them. It was in their intellectual and cultural slavery before all things that the colonials stood for that gave them a sense of superiority, they were never men enough to stand against colonial practices. It was superiority complex born out of a deep seated inferiority and feelings of inadequacy. All these people who reveled in the party had lost faith in their true selves and were happy to live lies comfortably. The colonial lies and left over practices after the departure of their colonial masters had become their

comfort zones. Anita Desai's short story therefore brings to light the pathetic condition of our so called elite and their follies. The thin border between the real and the unreal had been criss-crossed in their minds and they were virtually incapable of coming out of their acquired and assumed personalities. This condition of the guests at the party may be described as post-colonial schizophrenia.

The party begins in the dark for it is the time when we see less even with the support of artificial lights. The darkness outside cannot hide or conceal the darkness within for it surfaces every now and then in the party in the form of unkindness and jealousy. The darkness within is deeper and the darkness outside cannot swallow it, dispel it, nor can the special lights remove it. It is this mysterious darkness outside that informs the farewell party and is the essence of it – the point of the short story. The lawn had been specially watered and made greener because the climate during the summer generally made the grass parched brown. It was like the faces and pretentious exteriors that the hosts and guests put on to be at their best in appearance to out smart and out wit each other for questionable ends. The setting had been carefully worked out but it was not perfect and the moonless night had made the darkness more imposing, profound and thick as though it was in keeping with the darkness that informed their uneasy consciousness – forever feckless, fragile and manipulative. Vitality and plain robustness of the spirit eluded them. The lights, stars and fire flies combine together to create an atmosphere of splendor but with their radiance could only add some good cheer among the guests, camouflage their social designs which were aimed at self-promotion and self-prominence not erase the darkness within – no liquor, no food, no mirth could have wiped the depth of darkness at their cores for the cut-throat competition brought about by sly and treacherous colonial modernity had changed their basic natures. The unconscious drives, hidden under the blanket of the night, it seemed had been polluted by the urge to success. Their emotional intelligence was devoted to rising higher up in the social and professional ladder, becoming richer and as close as they could possibly get to the Englishmen life-style wise without giving themselves away. To succeed was painful but not to achieve the goals of their society was a greater pain – and they would not set aside these objectives like a stoic. After pain lay the pleasures of material success which no spirituality could have given them. It was after penetrating the darkness on its own conditions that they would experience the palpable light that was visible in the farewell party; but, light and darkness are merely matters of perception at best left to the individual human soul. The Hindu philosophy of renunciation and *maya* had lost all meaning after its encounter with the west and its elusive charms.

All those who were present had learned to live with the cankers of modernity and progress and Anita Desai does not insert a diametrically opposite character in the short story to act as a foil. The author leaves it for her readers to discover their own solutions to the problems of existence created by the modern civilization and the pursuit of material success. Desai makes no effort to throw up an answer at all! We are made to swim among the social currents and cross-currents by Anita Desai and then left to our own devices and ideas to find the shores of whatever may be the right way to live. This is no territory for the 'fainthearted' for existential matters can be deeply disturbing and thought inducing for those who care to think. Much as we may blame

the outside world for creating darkness within us, the fact remains that it is ultimately left to us to choose whether we want it or wish to reject it. It is the rat race that we join voluntarily and reduce ourselves to the level of vermin carrying wretched rats! The darkness within is always our own creation and is acerbated by our own impulse towards materialism, the desire to exceed others. The human core has been vitiated and polluted and no amount of liquor in the party could wash it away for on the slightest provocation it surfaces in the form of immodest and uncharitable behaviour. The excesses of success are symbolized by darkness; the velvet gloved, soft and pleasurable yet galling and psychologically hurting.

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