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Assignment #5

Conflicting Cultures

There is something intriguing about a person's need to meet expectations; these expectations can either come from the outside world or from the person himself. The person can see it as an obligation to family, culture, or race, but these expectations can conflict with that person's innermost desires. In "This Blessed House," the character of Sanjeev faces this conflict, as he struggles to balance the expectations to be married, Hindu and Indian with his desire to be alone and free.

Sanjeev's characterization of being a bachelor contrasts and conflicts greatly with the expectation of being a married man. Sanjeev relishes in the aloneness and freedom that comes from being a bachelor. His character compared with Twinkle's is more successful, organized and neat; where Sanjeev's personality is clean and straightforward, Twinkle's is unorganized and cluttered. Sanjeev tells Twinkle straight out what he does not want "displayed in our home" (110). He even goes as far to tell her that he will throw away the hoarded figures she finds. But as soon as she seems unhappy with him, he backs off and agrees to "settle on a compromise" (117). In his previous life living alone, Sanjeev would have never had to compromise about what to put in his home. However, because of the expectation put upon him from his mother and the matchmakers, he has to try to cast aside that part of his life and make the marriage work, despite his unhappiness. His mother tells Sanjeev that he needs "a wife to look after and love" (116) and Sanjeev and Twinkle marry only after the "urging of their matchmakers" (113). Despite his initial thoughts that he might be in love, Sanjeev really only marries Twinkle because of the expectations from others.

When around those who are different than he, a person may try to accentuate his culture in an overt way as he believes that what the others expect from him. Such is the case with Sanjeev and his need to act Indian for his coworkers during the party. In his previous single life, Sanjeev did eat Indian food, but he never went to elaborate means to get it. However, for the party, he goes to great lengths to serve Indian food, having it catered and he spends "the greater part of the morning and afternoon preparing" (118) his home to be Indian enough for his coworkers.

This expectation of culture also filters into religion. Does a person not try to exemplify their religion when surrounded by those of a different religion? Sanjeev does this throughout the story, always exclaiming "we're not Christian" (108). To him, he does not see what Twinkle sees—beauty and artistry. He sees a lack of a "sense of sacredness" (109). Although Sanjeev has to constantly remind Twinkle that they are in fact Hindu and not Christian, and he has to "explain for the fortieth time that he wasn't Christian" to his coworkers, there is never any explanation of how Sanjeev actually lives Hinduism. He only tries to come off as Hindu, which is why having the Christian idols in his home disturbs him; it ruins the façade.

Because of the built up expectations Sanjeev has had placed on him, and those he has placed on himself, he finds that he is frustrated and unhappy in his life. He realizes that he only has true joy when he is alone and far from the crowd and their supposed expectations. When he has the house to himself, he thinks of "all the things he could do, undisturbed" (122). Although he has tried to meet those expectations, he still, deep down, seeks out the solitude and peace that he had when those expectations were not being addressed.

Discussion question: How do we try to meet the supposed expectations of those who are different than us? Do we act in an overly religious or American way?