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The Second Generation of Immigrants in Meera Syal's Novel *Anita and Me*

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

Práce se zaměří na román Anita and me od současné britské autorky paňdžábského původu Meery Syal a na otázku druhé generace imigrantů. V úvodní části práce autorka zasadí román do společensko-kulturního kontextu sedmdesátých let 20. století ve Velké Británii a vymezí problematiku a specifika druhé generace imigrantů a jejich života v této zemi. V hlavní části se autorka zaměří na dílo Anita and me a na vystopování a analýzu prvků spojených s životem druhé generace imigrantů - například na otázku identity, vliv britských vrstevníků a rodiny. Na konci práce autorka své závěry přehledně shrne.

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Souhlasím s prezenčním zpřístupněním své práce v Univerzitní knihovně.

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the topic of second generation immigrants in Meera Syal's book *Anita and Me*. In the theoretical part of the thesis, immigration to the Great Britain during the 1960s is discussed as well as the opinions on this matter not only of the British but also of the immigrants themselves. Enoch Powell and his 'Rivers of Blood' speech represent the prevalent part of the discussion. The analytical part further develops the topic of the second generation immigrants and focuses on looking for their identity. This part also describes their confusion since they live between two different cultures and they have to acknowledge both of them.

Key words: friendship; identity; class difference; disappointment; family values; growing up process

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zaměřuje na téma druhé generace imigrantů v díle Meery Syal, *Anita and Me* [Anita a já]. První část práce pojednává o imigraci do Velké Británie v šedesátých letech dvacátého století. Zmiňuje tohoto tématu se týkající názory nejen ze strany Britů, ale i ze strany samotných imigrantů. Enoch Powell a jeho *Rivers of Blood speech* [Řeč o proudech krve] jsou nejčastějším tématem teoretické části této práce. Analytická část pak dále rozvíjí téma druhé generace imigrantů a zaměřuje se především na hledání jejich identity. Popisuje také zmatení, co se jejich pozice ve společnosti týče, protože se nacházejí mezi dvěma rozdílnými kulturami a na vědomí musí brát jak jednu, tak druhou.

Klíčová slova: přátelství; identita; třídní rozdíly; zklamání; rodinné hodnoty; dospívání

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1. Introduction

This bachelor thesis studies the second generation immigrants within the book *Anita and Me* written by a comedian of British-Asian origin, Meera Syal. Meera Syal was born as a child of Indian immigrants and grew up in a village of Essington, near Wolverhampton, England. Her book can be regarded as partially autobiographical since many experiences and situations that happens to the main protagonist of the book happened to Meera Syal personally as well. Along with the help of the book *Anita and Me*, the thesis describes one of the most important problems connected to the second generation of immigrants, which is looking for their identity and it is also the uncertainty about where they really belong to.

This thesis is divided into two parts, the theoretical and the analytical one. The theoretical part is opened with the analyses of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech and offers various points of view, opinions and reactions that comment on the speech. There are also opinions of the fictitious characters of the book *Anita and Me* included. In this case, their personal views and opinions are expressed through the author's own thoughts and experiences.

The analytical part is divided into three parts. It generally deals with the novel *Anita and Me*, which follows two years in the life of a nine-year-old Meena Kumar, who is a child of Indian immigrants. As a second generation immigrant, Meena's position within the British and the Indian societies is very specific. This part of the thesis first explores Meena's position between the two cultures. At the beginning, the thesis also describes the disadvantages of a twofold cultural background and their impact on Meena. The whole analytical part follows Meena's looking for her identity along with her growing up, which is linked together very tightly. Since Meena is born and raised in England, she starts her looking for identity within the English society, more specifically, within the working class village of Tollington where she lives along with her parents. Her further growing maturity is conditioned by encountering racism, different classes of the society and values connected with them.

Last but not least, Meena learns that she can rely on herself and her family only. Once her Tollington friends disappoint her and they offend the community she belongs

to, Meena starts growing up and along with maturity there comes acknowledgement and decisiveness. Meena needs literally to 'grow' into her identity rather than find it.

The main aim of this thesis is to find out where the second generation immigrants' identity lie, how do they form their identity and what helps them or, on the contrary, makes their way more difficult. The second generation of immigrants is represented by the main protagonist of the book, Meena Kumar, and following her story is supposed to help to better understand the problem of identity and confusion the second generation immigrants often suffer from.

2. Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech

2.1 'Rivers of Blood' speech

At the beginning of the sixties, in 1963, there were around 18 000 Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi doctors coming to Britain having responded hereby to the invitation from the then Health Minister, Enoch Powell. Powell used to work in India and racial equality seemed to be a matter of course to him. Ed West, the Telegraph journalist and social commentator, reveals that Powell "once refused to stay in a hotel until an Indian comrade was allowed to stay too". (2011)

Enoch Powell was a supporter of Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani skilled labour coming to Britain after the World War II and helping to refresh the British National Health Service. (Power, 2010) There has been a British television drama introduced, which is called *The Indian Doctor*, and it follows the topic of Indian doctors who came to Britain hoping for better opportunities than they might have got at home. Its producer, Tom Ware, explains that "although they [the Indian doctors] were from India, they came in as the professional classes and had instant respect in that regard". (Power, 2010)

It was very surprising when later that decade, Enoch Powell expressed himself radically against immigrants. In one of his articles, Sarfraz Manzoor, a Guardian journalist, highlights that Powell hereby betrayed all the doctors and nurses who had been invited to help the National Health Service and then, when no more needed, rejected. (2008) Manzoor adds that „he [Powell] was betraying everyone, of every colour, who believed that diversity could enrich as well as threaten a nation.“ (2008)

In 1968, Enoch Powell gave his debatable 'Rivers of Blood' speech. The controversial name was derived from the equally controversial quote of a Roman poet Virgil and Powell used this quote in his speech: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.' " (The Telegraph, 2007) In this speech he criticised immigration and he offered a radical solution. June Bam-Hutchinson, working for the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past, quotes social commentators who were also wondering about the irony:

These were Commonwealth citizens invited to come and help the 'mother country' after the end of the World War II, but who were faced with signs of 'No Blacks' as they searched for places to stay in Britain, and were refused entry to public places like restaurants and pubs.” (Bam-Hutchinson)

Nevertheless, Powell supported his ideas by quoting ordinary people from the public. He mentioned, apart from other people, a man with whom he fell into conversation. The man claimed that “in this country [Britain] in 15 or 20 years’ time the black man will have the whip hand over the white man”. (The Telegraph, 2007) That also played a part for Powell who warned the British public that “in 15 or 20 years, on present trends, there will be in this country three and a half million Commonwealth immigrants and their descendants”. (The Telegraph, 2007) He supported his claims with referring to the Registrar General's Office. He warned that “they [the English] found themselves made strangers in their own country.”

In order to avoid misunderstandings and ambiguity, Enoch Powell explicitly emphasized that people who came to Britain to study or to improve their skills and to use them later back in their countries of origin were not immigrants. With having claimed this, he also meant the doctors he had invited to support the National Health System. (The Telegraph, 2007)

Nevertheless, the public understood it in their own way and Powell’s speech provoked contradictory reactions. He received a great amount of comments, most of them were consents with his opinions and only a fragment of the reactions was disapproving. (Manzoor, 2008)

As far as the attitude of the public is concerned, Powell suggested:

Whatever drawbacks attended the immigrants arose not from the law or from public policy or from administration, but from those personal circumstances and accidents which cause, and always will cause, the fortunes and experience of one man to be different from another's. (The Telegraph, 2007)

Enoch Powell indirectly claimed that the British people, on the basis of various encounters with immigrants, decided about what they really wanted and their decision was that they did not entirely agree with the immigration situation. He immediately gave an example of antisocial behaviour of the immigrants and used it as a strong argument to prove how difficult it was for the local people to get along with the newcomers and how maladjusted immigrants could be.

He gives an anonymous elderly woman as an example. She remained the last white inhabitant of a whole neighbourhood and she started feeling threatened because “windows are broken. She finds excreta pushed through her letter box. When she goes to the shops, she is followed by children, charming, wide-grinning piccaninnies.” She complained that their knowledge of the English language was insufficient and that ‘Racialist’ was the only English word they knew well. (The Telegraph, 2007) With slightly ironic tone, Enoch Powell added that integration was, in fact, impossible for many immigrants and he, without scruple, gave the colour of their skin as the reason:

The other dangerous delusion from which those who are wilfully or otherwise blind to realities suffer, is summed up in the word ‘integration.’ To be integrated into a population means to become for all practical purposes indistinguishable from its other members. Now, at all times, where there are marked physical differences, especially of colour, integration is difficult though, over a period, not impossible. (The Telegraph, 2007)

Enoch Powell suggested that certain groups of immigrants can never adapt no matter how hard they try since their skin colour is an unchangeable factor that will distinguish them forever. As Jason Strelitz, a doctoral student from the Centre of Analysis of Social Exclusion of London school of Economics, also points out, “the post-1945 situation evolved into a focus on ethnic and racial minorities rather than immigrants” but, unlike Powell, his attitude has an unbiased overtone. (2004, 2) Strelitz defends immigrants who are of a different than a white colour by quoting Adrian Favell, a professor of sociology in Paris, who assumes that the view of British public is distorted. They more often notice immigrants coming from so called New Commonwealth countries, even though immigrants from countries of Old Commonwealth and Europe outnumber them. (Strelitz, 2) He is, on the other hand, not against the idea of carrying out analyses “based on race and ethnicity”. He reckons that such analyses and researches are important for a certain reason:

The persistent prevalence of racism and racial disadvantage means that it is imperative to continue monitoring and tracking the situation across a broad range of dimensions and to deconstruct racism in wider institutional, cultural and personal settings. (Strelitz, 3)

Jason Strelitz's opinion is obviously aimed against racism on individual as well as institutional level, whereas Powell's opinion is rather aimed against immigration itself.

2.2 Powell's solution to the immigration problem

Powell's solution to the immigration problem, however, did not consider deconstruction of racism but rather deconstruction of immigration. In his speech, Enoch Powell came up with a radical solution. He suggested stopping the immigration inflow and maximizing its outflow from the country. He supported his controversial ideas with an opinion that such was, actually, the policy of the Conservative Party he was a member of. He, in fact, was making references to the Conservative Party program and policy throughout the whole speech. He quoted three points of the Party's immigration policy program that also included 'the encouragement of re-emigration', which basically stood for the assisted emigration. That meant immigrants would have been encouraged and supported by the government either to return to the country of their origin or to move to any other foreign country that needed labour force and was willing to accept the help from abroad. (The Telegraph, 2007) And Powell went further with the third element of the immigration policy claiming:

The third element of the Conservative Party's policy is that all who are in this country as citizens should be equal before the law and that there shall be no discrimination or difference made between them by public authority. As Mr Heath has put it we will have no 'first-class citizens' and 'second-class citizens'. This does not mean that the immigrant and his descendent should be elevated into a privileged or special class or that the citizen should be denied his right to discriminate in the management of his own affairs between one fellow-citizen and another or that he should be subjected to imposition as to his reasons and motive for behaving in one lawful manner rather than another. (The Telegraph, 2007)

Powell's tone was changing throughout his speech and whereas at the beginning, he rather hold back, later he did not hesitate to use words such as 'Negro' or 'piccaninnies'. (The Telegraph, 2007) He juxtaposed the American black population and the British immigrants and complained that whereas the Afro-Americans had to achieve and literally deserve their citizen status they have today, the immigrants flowing to Britain were already coming as full citizens. (The Telegraph, 2007) Jason Strelitz

also compares immigration to the UK and to the USA but he, simultaneously, adds that “whereas immigration is part of national ideology and self-definition in the US, in the UK ‘immigration’ is often at best seen as an unhelpful word and at worst seen as a dirty one”. (2004, 2)

Enoch Powell further tried to prove that he was not the only one who protested against immigration. There were far more people who agreed with Powell but who were, however, afraid of speaking in public since the general policy of the government suppressed discrimination against immigrants as much as possible. Powell quoted a girl who wished to remain anonymous. She explained that “racial prejudice won’t get you anywhere in this country.” (The Telegraph, 2007) Was this meant in a rather positive or negative way, Enoch Powell, nevertheless, used it in his own way as a contributive argument to his speech. He was speaking about immigrants, especially of those who were of a different skin colour, as of a “cloud no bigger than a man's hand, that can so rapidly overcast the sky”. (The Telegraph, 2007) Since Powell was originally from Wolverhampton, he was speaking from his own experience when he said that that the black population in Wolverhampton was spreading very quickly.

At the end of the speech, he, again, returned to the Conservative Party and he quoted one of his colleagues, John Stonehouse, who claimed:

The Sikh communities’ campaign to maintain customs inappropriate in Britain is much to be regretted. Working in Britain, particularly in the public services, they should be prepared to accept the terms and conditions of their employment. To claim special communal rights (or should one say rites?) leads to a dangerous fragmentation within society. This communalism is a canker; whether practised by one colour or another it is to be strongly condemned. (The Telegraph, 2007)

Powell himself finished his speech with making an appeal to people that “only resolute and urgent action will avert it even now” and however unsure about whether people would follow him or not, he believed that “to see, and not to speak, would be the great betrayal”. (The Telegraph, 2007)

2.3 Reactions to the ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech

Individual reactions to Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech are full of contradiction. Bruce Anderson, a conservative columnist, compares Powell’s speech to a “verbal hand grenade”. He suspects Powell that he gave the speech not because of his own conviction but because of his desire for success. (2007) He explains Powell’s contradictory behaviour as a typical behaviour of a politician:

Politicians are entitled to change their minds. When they do so, they are always more persuasive if they admit what is happening and confess to earlier misjudgments. Although Enoch's vanity would never have allowed him to behave in that way, this is no reason to credit him with pure motives. (Anderson, 2007)

Sarfraz Manzoor agrees and suggests that the purpose of Enoch Powell’s speech was to attack the Labour government. Their program, in fact, was supposed to “outlaw racial discrimination in employment and housing”. There are also assumptions that Powell intended to destabilize the Prime Minister’s position. (Manzoor, 2008)

Bruce Anderson also criticizes Powell and accuses him of selfishness and narcissism and he describes him as “incapable of playing in a team or displaying loyalty to the captain”. (2007) Anderson comes up with an argument claiming that Powell, on the one hand, gained a great support from the public but, on the other hand, it did not affect the level of immigration at all. Moreover, it made it even more complicated to discuss the topic in a ‘polite’ or political society. (2007)

Powell might have chosen an honest and sincere attitude but vocabulary he had used and the way the speech was given, seems to be inappropriate to someone engaged in a political environment and he, paradoxically, contributed to slowing down the process of solving the immigration problem. Derek Brown goes even further and he calls Powell a “dotty old classicist” who “potted off to Northern Ireland to end his political days as an eloquent, irrelevant, Ulster Unionist”. (2001) He even describes Powell’s intentions as ‘ethnic cleansing’. (2001)

One of the first black immigrants who came to Wolverhampton, Lance Bunkley, is of the similar opinion as Derek Brown and he describes Powell as “a psychotic escapist with megalomaniac tendencies”. He explains why he is using such strong words. Before

Powell's speech, streets were quite safe for black people but after then people of different ethnicities were worried about their safety, and interpersonal relationships across ethnic groups also worsened noticeably. (Manzoor, 2008)

Robert Shepherd, a broadcaster and a biographer of Enoch Powell, nevertheless, tries to explain the real intentions of Powell and his 'Rivers of Blood' speech from a rather positive point of view. Along with a Cambridge historian Peter Brooke they assume that the meaning of Powell's words in 1968 originated in his time spent in India. Shepherd's interpretation of Powell's intentions is as follows:

Brigadier Powell argued that India was not ready for independence, because of 'communalism', i.e. an overriding loyalty to a group that would prevent people being rational voters or accepting the majority decision when they were in a minority. The bloody, communal violence that accompanied Indian partition and independence confirmed his worst fears. (2008)

According to Shepherd's opinion "Powell feared that immigration would import communalism into Britain, eroding its homogeneous electorate and undermining its parliamentary system." (2008) Nevertheless, Enoch Powell stepped over a certain political border and based on the 'Rivers of Blood' speech, he was removed from the Conservative Party shadow cabinet without any possibility to return. Finally, in 1974 he left the Conservative Party as well.

2.4 Reactions of the public

Powell's speech had not only a general impact on public opinion but it also influenced concrete relationships between immigrants and local people at many places of the United Kingdom. The primary source book of this thesis, *Anita and Me*, touches the topic of Powell's speech as well. The story offers a point of view from 'the other side'. Apart from other things, the author narrates a story about an immigrant Indian couple, the Kumars, coming to Britain in the sixties to look for better opportunities but not as much for themselves as for their child Meena. They are more or less accepted by the small community of the village of Tollington they are living in. They are the only Indian family in the village, which gives them a certain privilege within the local society.

Even though they get on well with the villagers, the general prejudice is still present on both sides. The general view of the English on the the newly arrived immigrants from former colonies is probably best expressed by Mr Ormerod, a local shop owner. He thinks that it is not only “giving stuff” to the colonies, it is also about “giving them culture as well, civilisation”. Mr Ormerod adds that it looks like Britain being a charity and they do not want to be a charity. (Syal, 172)

Since the general attitude of the society towards immigration is rather negative, more radical prejudices start appearing even among the white population of Tollington. In 1964, a Tory, Peter Griffiths, won the election with his slogan: ‘If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote Labour.’ (Brown, 2001) One of the Tollington working class adolescents and later a sympathiser of skinheads, Sam Lowbridge, also used this slogan in order to draw attention but he does not understand that his words, even though used in a wider context, have a huge impact on specific people. He is repeating words he does not even fully understand and they hurt the very tiny minority of the village of Tollington, more specifically, Meena Kumar. (Syal, 273)

While Sam’s words have an impact on a little girl of an Indian origin, the adults discuss the words of someone more respected such as Enoch Powell and his ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech. Meena’s uncles criticise Powell’s speech and they talk about him as “that Powell Bastard with his bloody rivers” and they are plucking up the courage with saying that “if he wants us send back, let him come and damn well try”. (Syal, 267)

However, Powell’s speech and the general conflict concerning the immigration situation triggered off events that finally hit even the small village of Tollington. This village has been peaceful for a long time and although racial issues had to be solved in bigger towns, Tollington has not been exposed to racial hatred until an Indian man is beaten up there badly for no reason and the small Indian community living either in Tollington or near is afraid. Even Meena realizes the seriousness of the situation: “This was too close to home, and for the first time, I wondered if Tollington would ever truly be home again.” (Syal, 275)

Norman Tebbit, a second generation child whose parents came from Pakistani, has the same feelings as the fictitious character of Meena and he says: “Repatriation was a most terrifying word for a young boy who knew nothing but Britain.” (Manzoor, 2008) Enoch Powell talked about sending immigrants back to their home countries but did he

think about the second generation children? They were already born in England and they regard it as their home. They have never visited their parents' home country before and in fact, such country means no home for them any more, whereas 'England' accepts them with grumbling. Where do they belong then? Are they of the same nationality as their parents or are they already English because they speak indistinguishable local accents? Nevertheless, their skin colour betrays them.

3. Meena Kumar – an English girl

3.1 Confused Meena Kumar

At the very beginning of the analytical part of this thesis, there are Meera Syal's own words about the book *Anita and Me* worth mentioning. Meera Syal de facto explains that the story of her book deals, above all, with identity of any kind:

This is not just a British-Asian story. This is a family story, and one about a passionate friendship that goes wrong. It's about finding out where you are, and where your loyalties lie. Those are issues that affect everybody. (Gritten, 2002)

Ulla Ambursley, the author of the *The Search for Identity in Anita and Me and The Buddha of Suburbia*, opens her essay with reflecting on identity. She assumes that "one of the most important factors affecting our identity, is connected to the encounters that are made throughout life". (2006, 3) She refuses that identity would be something static and she regards it as something variable and difficult to be grasped. It is "more natural for some and more complex to others". (2006, 3)

In the opinion of Anthony D. Smith, "self is composed of multiple identities and roles – familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender". (1991, 4) Identity can be hereby understood as a valuable determiner of people's personalities. Identity cannot be looked at from only one point of view since it is a very complex term, it varies from person to person and for that reason, identity is very difficult to be generalized.

Formation of one's identity depends on many factors that form people while growing up, such as family, friends, even temporary acquaintances, life experiences, and various interesting encounters. Nevertheless, identity is variable and thanks to experiences it changes during life as well as people are constantly changing and forming their personalities. It is a process that never stops and therefore, to find the true and perfectly matching identity appears to be almost impossible.

The main protagonist of the book *Anita and Me*, Meena Kumar, who is a nine-year-old daughter of an Indian immigrant couple, is looking for her identity as well. Anthony D. Smith states that ethnic identity is closely connected to descent more than territory. (1991, 12) That is what partially causes the confusion to the second generation of immigrants, including Meena who belongs to such generation.

Looking for identity is not as easy for Meena as it is for her white peers. Their identity is partially given to them by birth. They were born into the same environment as their parents but Meena was born into different environment than her parents and thus there is no one to help her to orientate around. She has no one to advise her where she belongs to, since she is stuck between two completely different worlds of England and India that were once connected in an ambiguous relationship. She feels she is a stranger in both these worlds and she is not “able to fully meet the standards of either culture”. (Ambursley, 19). Meena feels she bounces between two cultures and explains her feelings of estrangement with the following words:

I was a freak of some kind, too mouthy, clumsy and scabby to be a real Indian girl, too Indian to be a real Tollington wench, but living in the grey area between all categories felt increasingly like home. (Syal, 149-150)

As Dr. Bubíková states, “she [Meena] does not want to follow the Indian ideal set within the family, she can never fully assimilate to become an English girl, nor does she find adequate models of British-Indians in the mainstream culture of the media”. (2010, 175). Meena is growing up within a society that is standing at its beginning of the change from monocultural to multicultural form and she is, in fact, a member of the generation that greatly contributed to the multicultural British society as it is known today. However, she does not have any example of a second generation immigrant to follow. She is, basically, the one who will once set an example to the following generations but there is no one in her environment who would lead her. Therefore, she gains her life experience through attempts and mistakes. Concerning any public person who would be an Indian-British and would set an example to Meena, there is lack of such people and hardly any of them could be truly successful in Britain. When Meena reflects about escaping from Tollington, she thinks a television competition might be one of the possibilities how to show her literary talent but then it comes to her mind that she has never seen anyone “who wasn’t white” there and “that might count against me”, Meena is worried. (Syal, 65).

Meena is well aware of the two cultures clashing. She finds herself somewhere in-between and she is confused because she does not know for sure which one of the two worlds is truly hers. She often thinks she can be the true English girl but then she can

feel that “there was a corner of me that would be forever not England.” (Syal, 112) And although the twofold cultural background is already a part of Meena’s everyday life, it does not help her to solve the dilemma which one to choose and what life to live.

Something trivial to a European such as Christmas is distant to the Kumar family and it is, basically, a matter of different religion that is further connected to different customs and habits. Meena’s parents accept this Christian holiday only because of Meena not to “feel left out” from the society she is growing up in. (Syal, 92) Christmas is compared by Meena’s family to the Hindu celebration of light, Diwali, although it is rather not the best comparison but it works when explaining it to the English people. (Syal, 91) Such religious identity is another factor that distinguishes the Kumars from the rest of Tollington. Anthony D. Smith comments on religious identity that it is “based on alignments of culture and its elements – values, symbols, myths and traditions”. (1991, 6)

Meena has to, obviously, distinguish not only between two cultures’ habits but also between two classes’ habits, which makes her looking for an identity even more confusing. She notices that fishfingers are generally eaten food among the Tollington children and Meena suddenly starts refusing the food made by her mum since it is Indian food and she wants fishfingers. (Syal, 60) She regards them, according to her own observation, as typical English food and therefore, she thinks that eating such food instead of the Indian traditional food would bring her closer to being English. Her position in-between is even more complicated because she has to be able to distinguish all the fine nuances of two distinct cultures at the age of nine when most of the children at the same age are hardly able to distinguish rules within a single culture only.

When the whole Kumars’ family and their friends meet and they start talking about their past connected to India, Meena feels they are becoming strangers to her. (Syal, 72) She sees no point in attending such gatherings because “in these moments, they were all far far away”. (Syal, 72) Meena’s father reminds her of the confusion about where she truly belongs to by unintentional comment: “You really must learn Punjabi, Meena. Look how left out you feel.” (Syal, 205) Whereupon, Meena suddenly feels even more lonely and she feels wounded since her father spotted exactly the most vulnerable place in her mind. “To know a language, then, is to belong to its particular culture. In such a context, language acquires and provides a legitimising function,”

claims Leila Neti, the author of a chapter *Siting Speech: The Politics of Imagining the Other in Meera Syal's Anita and Me*. (Murphy, 101)

Meena has been already born in England and her Midlands accent perfectly coincides with the environment she is living in now. Nevertheless, her skin colour and lifestyle of her family puts Meena into a completely different context and reveals the ambiguity of her situation. Her parents were born in India and they will always perceive India as their home country. For Meena, England is the home country. Therefore, she is confused when their grandma, who came to visit them and stayed for some time, should return back to India and Meena's father suggests that they will take her "home" themselves. That makes Meena reflect: "I felt strange that he used that word 'home' so naturally, did that mean that everything surrounding us was merely our temporary lodgings?" (Syal, 263)

Meena's position, which she perceives to be very confusing, might be, however, beneficial to both cultures surrounding herself; it is beneficial for everyone, except for her. She represents an imaginary bridge over the gap that divides the Indian immigrants and the English. Meena senses things that are hidden to both communities.

She feels ashamed or rather afraid when her relatives celebrate outside, having fun and being noisy. Meena, as a narrator, explains that the "Tollington front gardens were purely for display purposes". She feels discomfort and adds that "it felt strange to hear Punjabi under the stars. It was an indoor language to me". (Syal, 203) Meena further reflects on her feelings describing it as follows:

I hesitated on the porch step, unsure whether to flee indoors, dreading what the reaction of any passers-by might be, but also strangely drawn to this unfamiliar scene where my two worlds had collided and mingled so easily. (Syal, 204)

Meena realizes that she represents a fictitious bridge connecting two cultures and that she was not put into this position voluntarily. Her role is to understand both worlds and to respond all of their needs as immediately and precisely as possible.

3.2 Meena Kumar meets Anita Rutter

Meena feels strong pressure that forces her to choose one cultural life style or another and, as a result, she turns away from the culture of her parents. She rather chooses to belong among the Tollington white adolescents. She is starting her adolescent years herself as well and it seems to be, actually, boring to her to be at home with her parents and to play with much younger Indian cousins. She perceives it as more interesting to hang around with older English peers who have completely different and for Meena, therefore, more exciting lives than she is used to in her family. Ulla Ambursley is of the same opinion claiming that “Meena rejects one culture for the other.” Meena basically “despises everything that she and her family represent and is desperate to distance herself from it.” (2006, 21) Ulla Ambursley also adds:

For a young person, his/her identity is very much linked to their friends. It is nearly impossible for a person’s identity, while growing up, not to be influenced by the social environment where he/she exists. To be able to to some extent form/influence one’s identity experiences of other people, different surroundings are important. These factors can help an individual to mature and with that also mature and gain perspective on things in life such as who he/she is. (2006, 21)

Friends are a natural part of the growing up process and as it is depicted in the novel *Anita and Me*, they also influence formation process of Meena’s identity. For teenagers, it is supposed to be normal to be surrounded by people of their age and to be influenced by them to a certain degree. That is the moment when Meena meets Anita Rutter.

Once Meena meets Anita, she understands that Anita is her “passport to acceptance”. (Syal, 148) Anita is popular among Tollington adolescents, she is popular among boys and she is a leader. Meena can see that if she were accepted by Anita, she would be accepted by the whole adolescent population of Tollington as well.

Meena and Anita’s friendship begins with Meena’s endless admiration for Anita: “It had been the first time Anita had ever talked to me and I had wondered what I had done to deserve it.” (Syal, 17) Anita represents to Meena almost everything Meena wants to be in order to fit Tollington. Anita’s appearance and behaviour fascinate Meena because she longs for being the same, she longs for being respected by her white peers and especially by Anita. The author describes Anita through Meena’s eyes:

She ruled over all the kids in the yard with a mixture of pre-pubescent feminine wiles, pouting, sulking, clumsy cack-handed flirting and unsettling mood swings which would often end in minor violence. She had the face of pissed-off cherub, huge green eyes, blonde hair, a curling mouth with slightly too many teeth and a brown birthmark under one eye which when she was angry, which was often, seemed to throb and glow like a lump of Superman's kryptonite. (Syal, 39)

Meena perceives her friendship with Anita as very important and is able to do anything to make it work. She, without even realizing the meaning of her actions, despises her own family and their origin in order to prove Anita that her friendship is real and strong. Meena steals a tin with collection money in Mr Ormerod's shop and puts the blame on her two little Indian cousins who are there with her. Naturally, parents of Meena and parents of her cousins get to know soon what has happened and Meena's cousins are unfairly punished by their parents since Meena insists that the tin has been stolen by them. (Syal, 154)

Meena also, despite the fact that she knows she will be punished by her parents, does not care and is willing to risk it. She is convinced by Anita to disturb the tranquility around a house where an ill elderly lady lives along with her husband. When her husband threatens them to stop or he will tell their parents, Anita answers that he can do so, but she and her mother do not care. (Syal, 45) Meena thinks it is only a kind of trick Anita plays on the man and she does not realize that Anita's mother really does not care. Meena sees only what she wants to see and in that moment, in spite of feeling sorry for disturbing the elderly ill woman, she mainly sees Anita and her endless courage. Meena confesses that Anita makes her feel "taller and sharper and ready to try anything".(Syal, 53)

3.3 Anita becomes real

What the society has given Anita, she gives it back to them and she likes pushing the boundaries. Being bored since no one seems to care for her, teasing Meena belongs to Anita's favourite hobbies because Meena is always around, available and therefore an easy target of Anita's moody behaviour. Anita, for example, tries to convince Meena that a witch is living in a mysterious 'Big House' at the edge of the village and that only the right Christian prayers are effective against her. That is basically quite provocative

from Anita but Meena oversees her provocation. (Syal, 101) Meena is devoted to Anita and as she also describes, their gatherings looked like “Anita talked and I [Meena] listened with the appropriate appreciative noises. But I never had to force my admiration, it flowed from every pore because Anita made me laugh like no one else”. (Syal, 138)

In Meena’s eyes, Anita is better than she is in real and Meena therefore perceives her as someone adult, mature and experienced. Meena sees her as an example she has to follow in order to grow up and to be mature as well. Apart from other things, Anita is a source of Meena’s early sex education as well and even though she does not know much, she knows at least something and Meena is impressed even by Anita’s minor knowledge. The narrator describes that sex “hung around her [Anita] anyway like a faint perfume” and “it was inevitable that Anita would get round to sex”. (Syal, 139) Everything that Anita does surprises Meena and Meena is almost like addicted to her because everything is so new and unexplored. Meena wants to mature as quickly as possible but she does not realize the seriousness of her wish.

The topic of maturity also coincides with the relationship of Anita and her mother, Deirdre. Since Anita is cheeky to her own mum, Deirdre is, in return, irrespective to her. To Meena it seems that these two have a very friendly relationship because there is hardly any hint of parenting from Deirdre’s side and respect from Anita’s one. Therefore, Meena sees Anita as an adult who can already afford to be friends with her mum. Meena wishes to skip her childhood and to have this kind of relationship with her own mum as well. When a funfair is held in the village, Deirdre even attends some of the attractions with Anita. Meena is very enthusiastic about it, thinking: “Anita’s mother has brought her to the fair! Anita’s mother actually goes on rides with her, rides that would give my mama a migraine for a week. I was completely impressed.” (Syal, 121)

Meena is spending more and more time with Anita and thus she cannot avoid getting to know Anita’s real family background that explains her behaviour a lot. The fact is that Deirdre and Anita behave ruthlessly to each other, which does not represent a friendship but just, as a matter of fact, lack of respect. At the funfair, Meena happens to see Deirdre and Anita’s boyfriend cheating on Anita. (Syal, 121) Meena is confused and surprised that a mother is able to do this to her own daughter. Meena tries to protect Anita from discovering it and she feels that she cannot leave Anita alone in a moment

like this. (Syal, 122) Meena shows a considerable amount of compassion and friendship. She also shows her real nature. She is able to be decisive and to stand by her decisions.

Meena comes from a family where love is the main bond among their members and she assumes it works the same in other families. It is very surprising to her, when she finds out more about the relationships within the Rutter family and that Anita's too much free time and freedom means, in fact, lack of Deirdre's interest. Meena's naivety is obvious when the two girls talk about their moms, who are both in a hospital but each for a different reason. (Syal, 133) Meena thinks Deirdre ended up in a hospital because she is having a baby as well as her mom is. Anita explains her that according to Deirdre, her husband beat her up but he denied it claiming that she had done it to herself. Anita's lack of information about home violence makes her believe her dad. What is more, the man's behavior towards his wife, Deirdre, in a way of "I'm not picking her up, she can come home on the bloody bus" is telling everything the reader needs to know about the situation within the Rutter family. (Syal, 133)

Anita Rutter is one of these tough girls and wild working class children strolling the streets of Tollington, but she has, in fact, never been treated in any other way herself. Meena describes she witnessed Deirdre speaking to Anita in a rather harsh way: "Whatever she [Deirdre] said to my friend [Anita], her daughter, a few short barking phrases, they had the desired effect. For the first time ever, I saw Anita Rutter burst into tears before fleeing down the nearest entry." (Syal, 206)

Once Anita is used to a certain kind of behaviour, it is difficult to learn something new, moreover, not to know there really is something else, something better. Meena, nonetheless, still admires Anita's bold character without any doubts: "Her irreverence was high summer for me, it made me shed inhibitions." (Syal, 138)

Anita's nature is tough but it seems to be only a shell. Anita is living in a shell in order not to be hurt by the tough life she is living. Unlike Meena's parents, who are always prepared to support their daughter and take care of her, Anita's mother does not hesitate and leaves Anita and her little sister behind escaping Tollington along with her lover. Both girls have to stay with their father who is not really interested in them. Anita is able to behave like nothing happened and that the situation did not really hit her. Meena, however, imagining how she, personally, would feel in the same situation feels the need to comfort Anita. Meena embraces and kisses Anita in order to let her know

she does not have to feel alone despite losing her mum at that moment. Anita, nevertheless, bursts out and accuses Meena of being a lesbian. (Syal, 247) Anita is not used to such friendly and affectionate behaviour, not even from her own family members, let alone from friends. Anita is even more surprised when Meena's mum acts in the same way as Meena and embraces Anita as well in order to comfort her. (Syal, 257)

3.4 Estrangement

The more Meena knows about Anita, the more intense feeling she has that she will never be the same as Anita no matter how hard she tries. Meena ended up not only in a completely different ethnic and cultural background but there is also a significant class difference. As Smith states, "class signifies social relationship" and that might be the explanation of why Meena faces problems to establish a lasting and quality relationship with her working class peers. (Smith, 5) She is of a different class, not only because of her family background but mainly for her intelligence and different way of thinking.

Meena assumes that Anita represents the whole English society but, in fact, Anita represents only a part of it, the working class. Meena's parents are university educated people. Her father "had completed a college degree in Liberal Arts and Philosophy".(Syal, 84) They are considered middle class. Nevertheless, as newcomers to Britain, they cannot choose much and they have to accept what the country offers. Their beginnings were difficult since the author describes the early years as "years of struggle and disillusion, living in a shabby boarding house room with another newly arrived immigrant family". (Syal, 9) They ended up living among the working class who have different values. Such values are, actually, not a matter of ethnicity but a matter of habit and family background. The author describes Mrs Kumar, Meena's mother, as she was a young "Punjabi girl suffering from culture shock, marooned and misplaced in Wolverhampton". (Syal, 9)

Paradoxically, Meena's skin colour is not the main obstacle for the Tollington children, though it plays a role. Her intelligence and the way she is being raised is the main cause of her estrangement and conflicts. Most children in Tollington have a different regime from Meena. They have a complete freedom because their parents do not care about them. Meena, like other children at her age would do, envies her friends

the seemingly carefree and ideal family situation and she rebels against her own parents in order to be like her white peers. It is obvious that, apart from their different ethnic backgrounds, what makes Meena and Anita so different from each other are their different family backgrounds. In her essay, Ulla Ambursley quotes Singh Ghuman, who explains that families originating from South Asia tend to keep traditions including keeping in touch with extended families and they also support their relatives whereas the west is more focused on individualism, which is considered as selfish by traditional South Asian families. (Ambursley, 11) Meena can perceive that there are certain misunderstandings that are not necessarily caused by cultural differences but by class differences and mainly by different attitudes of parents.

Meena's parents are strict but soft, whereas Anita's parents are harsh, which according to Meena's observations might be one of the features of the working class society of Tollington in general:

I knew this was the expected Tollington stance, attack being the best form of defence, and never ever show that you might be in pain. That would only invite more violence because pity was for wimps and wimps could not survive round here. (Syal, 52)

Meena, actually, feels respect for the working class women who, as she aptly expresses, are of "a stoic muscular resistance which made them ask for nothing and expect less". (Syal, 67) No wonder that the Tollington children are left behind and behave the way they behave, when their parents can hardly define their own relationships to their spouses, let alone to their children. As Meena observes the Tollington parents and married couples, she says: "I hardly ever saw them together and as for the Yard couples, I only managed to put husbands to wives on Saturday mornings when couples piled into their cars to go shopping." (Syal, 86)

4. Meena's image of friendship is shattered and so is her image of England

4.1 Meena's identity – steady or variable?

Meena's parents are strict and strict parents are generally perceived by children as unfair but on the other hand, they are grateful later because thanks to the parents' persistence and diligence, their children gain access to satisfactory future for themselves and their own future families. On the contrary, Anita's parents let their daughter do whatever she wants to and they do not set her any boundaries. On the one hand, Anita has freedom, which Meena is longing for right now but unlike Meena, Anita has not a perspective future, which Meena will have once and will be very grateful for it.

Although the Tollington children are free of parents' rules, they are not free from themselves and their identity of the working class. Britain has been a class-driven society and concerning social mobility, education plays a great part of the driving mechanism nowadays.

In Tollington, all the children attend a comprehensive school instead of a grammar school, which is considered to be more difficult and thus also more important but "no one had passed the Eleven-plus for a whole decade". (Syal, 136) Meena, actually, prepares for this exam and her parents believe she will pass it. Mark Stein claims that "in Meena's case, upward social mobility is facilitated through education" and that is exactly what her parents agree on as well. (Stein, 37) They perceive Meena's education as one of the first steps towards her better future, which is, apart from other things, the main reason why they left India and moved to England.

While most of the working class Tollington inhabitants have only a little chance to move upwards within the society, Meena's chances are bigger despite her immigration background. Even Sam Lowbridge, representing the working class young adults, seems to realize his situation and he openly and desperately asks Meena: "You can move on. How come? How come I can't?" (Syal, 314) Stein explains that "Sam is aware of the fact that, like many others of his white working-class peers in his village, he is stranded in the demising Tollington without fair chance of finding employment". (2004, 51) He

compares Sam to a social outcast who has no meaningful position in the society he is living in. (Stein, 51)

Unlike Stein, Dominic Head, a professor of English at Brunel University in London, is of a slightly different opinion assuming:

Beyond the question of class difference, which is a factor in their relative degrees of mobility, Meena's wider horizon has also, and more importantly, to do with her migrant identity, for it is this precious commodity that enables her to 'move on'. (2002, 174)

He also adds that "rootlessness is [in Meena's case] transformed from inner lack into a personal strength, enabling the migrant to remain untainted by surrounding social decline." (Head, 175) Meena seems to fit nowhere, which is caused by her migrant identity, but the same factors and differences that distract her from finding her identity in a certain community, make her be at home anywhere she chooses to.

Sam is, nevertheless, not the only one who feels that Meena has possibilities that he will never have. Unlike Deirdre, for example, he is young, without any commitments and thus he still has a chance to fight with his identity but Deirdre cannot. She has had to live with her unchanging identity for the whole life and therefore, she envies the Kumars their versatile position in the society of Tollington.

It is a surprising situation for Mrs Kumar when Deirdre provokes a discussion and accuses Mrs Kumar of stopping Meena meeting Anita. Mrs Kumar first thinks that their children are the main reason of the problem Deirdre wants to speak about, but Deirdre continues and Mrs Kumar finally finds out that the main problem lies somewhere deeper under the surface. Deirdre asks Mrs Kumar whether she thinks that Deirdre and her family "ain't good enough for you [for the Kumars]". (Syal, 215) That is quite surprising to Meena's mum and the author asks through Meena's thoughts: "How could we possibly think ourselves better than her?" (Syal, 215) Deirdre is, however, serious about it. Her body language and facial expression suggest fear, fear of the fact that the Kumars came to the village later than her, that they are immigrants, dark skinned and they are still more popular and better accepted than she is. The narrator expresses Deirdre's feelings as follows: "Deirdre had been seeking approval all her life in this village, her village, and I suppose she wanted to know why life was so bloody unfair." (Syal, 216)

In this point, basically, Meena realizes she has a certain advantage unlike her white but working class peers. The advantage is represented by her family background. Her parents are prepared to be involved into her education and personality formation, which is something that most of her peers cannot be provided with. Deirdre solves her feelings of being trapped in Tollington by escaping from it. Her decision, however, is very selfish considering she has two children who are not able to take care of themselves fully on their own. (Syal, 247)

In the village, in most cases, the Kumars are treated in the same way they treat the others, which means friendly and with respect. They have a very good relationship with their closest neighbours such as Mrs Worrall or Sandy. As Sandy herself says, she does not even perceive them as “foreign”. She says: “You’re just like one of us.” (Syal, 29). Mrs Worrall is of the same opinion. She likes the Kumars, especially Meena. Mrs Worrall is interested in Meena’s school progress and she is happy just to have Meena around. (Syal, 58) Meena finds out from her father that Mrs Worrall hardly ever sees her own grandchildren and that is why she focuses her attention and energy on Meena, who basically reminds her of a grandchild. (Syal, 135)

4.2 Ethnicity and skin colour do play a role

Despite the fact that the village of Tollington might behave friendly to the Kumars, radical opinions against the immigration still appear among the villagers. They are, on the one hand, not aimed at the Kumars directly but on the other hand, they assault the minority the Kumars represent. According to Dr. Bubíková, although our society is changing into multicultural and the diversity is perceived rather as positive, it does not mean that racism would be erased completely from the world. (2010, 172)

Meena’s childhood is marked with an innocent idea that Indians and the English are living peacefully together but soon she realizes that it is her skin colour that sometimes puts her into unpleasant situations. She can fit Tollington with her accent and behaviour but the colour of her skin is an important signifier she cannot get rid of. In Dr. Bubíková’s words, “while what sets her [Meena] apart from the rest of the Indian community are her personal individual features of character and also language, what

sets her apart from the rest of Tollington is simply her skin color, the external marker of her otherness.” (2010, 175)

Meena realizes her difference that alienates her from her white peers. As a girl in her starting adolescent years, she starts noticing boys around her and is wondering whether boys notice her as well. This is put into question during various situations Meena gets into. The narrator tells about a group of boys who have chosen to hang around with all the girls in Meena’s group except for her and a girl nicknamed ‘Fat Sally’. Meena explains the whole situation and also her feelings:

He came to rest on me, took in the winter coat, the scabbed knees, my stubborn nine-year-old face, and dismissed me with amusement and yes, relief. He had not got the short straw after all I knew, I knew that it was not because I was too young or badly dressed, it was something else, something about me so offputting, so unimaginable, that I made Fat Sally look like the glittering star prize. (Syal, 105)

Meena perceives that there is something missing to her to become the real English girl and since her dream is to be a famous writer one day or just famous no matter what she will do, she realizes quite well that the colour of her skin does play a role as well. It certainly counts against her. Meena’s difference might be obvious also at school, for example, during history or national geography lessons, when all the children learn that they are living in the so called Black Country “because many Darkies live here”, explains one of the pupils, which is a very racist statement and Meena objects to it but no one really takes her into account. (Syal, 22)

Meena reflects on how much will her skin colour affect her future life and her happiness, and she decides to ask the Jackie magazine for help: “Dear Cathy and Claire, I am brown, although I do not wear thick glasses. Will this stop me getting a guy?” (Syal, 145) Meena is worried, based on her previous experience that she would be more popular as a white girl. She thinks she would be happier if she were white and she thinks: “I had never wanted to be anyone else except myself only older and famous. But now, for some reason, I wanted to shed my body like a snake slithering out of its skin and emerge reborn, pink and unrecognisable.” (Syal, 146)

On the one hand, she tries to merge with Tollington but on the other hand, once someone offends the background of her family, she feels something is wrong as well as she feels angry while learning about the British-Indian relations history at school. It is a

topic that can be seen from many different points of view. The view that the British schools have chosen does not seem to be convenient for Meena. The Victorian propaganda of British dominance and Indian inferior position might be normal for the rest of the class, but for Meena, it represents quite unpleasant and even personal situation. (Syal, 211-212)

4.3 Meena's eyes open

Meena is strong enough to be able to face racist hints and offences from unknown people. Offensive words from these people cannot hurt her so much that she would break. These people, in fact, judge her only on the basis of the first sight such as an elderly woman expressing her anger through words: "Bloody stupid wog. Stupid woggy wog. Stupid." (Syal, 97)

Anyway, encounter with this woman makes Meena think about whether she is the only one that has ever heard an offence like this. She realizes that her parents are already used to such behaviour. It must have happened to them many times but they have never told Meena, probably to protect her. Meena suddenly feels something that connects her to her family again. Her parents understand her feelings and Meena feels safe. (Syal, 98) Dr. Bubíková says that juxtaposing Meena's father attitude to such offences and the racist pressure itself, Meena can deduce the seriousness of the whole situation, which influences her previous innocent and slightly naïve point of view. (2010, 173)

Later, however, Meena has to face verbal attacks openly offending her ethnic background and coming from her trusted friends. She is surprised and bitterly disappointed when Sam is publicly offending immigrants at the funfair, and what is more, he is doing so directly in front of Meena herself. To Meena's surprise, Anita actually approves if it. At the funfair, when people are deciding what to do with collected charity money, Sam strongly disagrees with the idea of sending it to Africa: "Yow don't do nothing but talk, [...]. And give everything away to some darkies we've never met. We don't give a toss for anybody else. This is our patch. Not some wogs' handout." (Syal, 193)

Meena basically lost two friends in one moment. She lost them not only because of their initiative but also because she has not been able to trust them fully again since that moment. She is able to stand the verbal racist attack from an unknown person but when these attacks come from someone close and trusted, she says she feels shattered: “I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. My legs felt watery and hot panic softened my insides to mush.” (Syal, 193)

Meena did not expect much from Anita, but she, at least, hoped for a little support that, nonetheless, never came: “I could feel Anita shifting beside me, I knew she would not hold me or take my hand.” (Syal, 193) However, Anita does not understand the seriousness of the situation at all. Her narrow-minded thinking allows her to hear only what she wants to hear and it does not even come to her mind that Meena might feel hurt with Sam’s words. She only follows her own selfish interests, exactly as her mum always does:

‘Wharrabout that then!’ she grinned, ‘In’t he bosting!’

‘What?’ I croaked.

‘Sam Lowbridge. He’s dead bloody hard, in’t he?’

‘Anita Rutter, yow am a bloody stupid cow sometimes.’ I said, and did not look back until I had reached the haven of papa’s arms. (Syal, 195)

The fact that Meena told Anita what she honestly thinks about her, puts Meena into a completely different position. The first step is always the most difficult one but one step follows another and once Meena realizes she is stronger than she even thought, she will never have to run away again. Meena has gone quite a long journey on a path leading to her identity and Anita plays a role in many of the situations connected to it as well as she plays a role in the whole Meena’s growing up process. Generally speaking, Anita has always pushed the boundaries of Meena’s patience and faithfulness. But even over all the Meena’s efforts to see the brighter side of Anita’s personality, Meena cannot help feeling bitterly disappointed.

Meena unintentionally overhears Anita telling her friends that she witnessed and even agreed with Sam and his group beating up an Indian man for only one reason, just because he was an Indian. (Syal, 277-278) That represents the most important breaking point of Anita and Meena’s friendship. The seriousness of the situation is so crucial that Meena is not able to overlook Anita’s imprudent and ignorant behaviour any more.

Therefore, this situation has also a great impact on Meena's beginning of the growing up process. This is the moment when Meena stops being a naïve child and learns to see the world in its true colours. She finds out that "all that time I wasted waiting for something to happen, when all I had to do was make something happen, it was waiting for me, it was as easy as this". (Syal, 279)

Meena has always been ignoring offences from Anita. Naturally, it did not feel pleasant to her but to protect the rights of the Indian community and basically her family as well would mean to protect everything she wanted to reject for the English culture. Meena feels confused but she does not hesitate when her so called friends go beyond the border and suddenly she does not think about what group does she belong to. She instinctively protects her family and everything that is connected to them including their ethnicity. Meena awakens from the illusion and constant struggle concerning questions about the identity and she realizes where she truly belongs to. She belongs to her family no matter who they are.

4.4 Meena speaks up

Sam Lowbridge, as well as Anita, marks and significantly influences Meena's maturity formation. When Meena meets Sam again after the incident at the funfair, she is angry. Not only for what he has done but also because he does not actually understand what impact his words had on Meena and her family. Meena, strengthened with the previous experience of telling Anita what she really thinks about her, expresses her opinion about Sam aloud and clearly in front of his friends: "If I was Sam's mum, I'd feel bloody responsible. But it ain't her fault her son's a prat." (Syal, 227) There, Sam understands that he has done something wrong and he wants to know whether Meena is angry with him. (Syal, 228) Despite his racist outbursts, good relationship with Meena still means a lot for him. Nevertheless, Meena is not ready to forgive him. She does not know why Sam cannot understand what he had done. She desperately tried not to be connected with the Indian minority and when Sam seems to perceive her as a single unit apart from her ethnic background, it feels wrong to her.

After the incident of the Indian man being beaten up by Sam's group of skinheads and Anita watching, Meena knows for sure that she has lost two friends forever.

Confronting Sam might be, nonetheless, perceived as one of the imaginary points marking the sudden beginning of Meena's growing up process. Sam, on the one hand, has affection for her, but on the other hand, he was able to beat up an Indian man, a man of the same ethnicity as Meena.

Stein perceives Meena as a brave girl saying that "after all, she dares to single-handedly confront the man whom she suspect of having seriously wounded the Indian man. Having realized that Sam feels inferior to her, she seizes her opportunity." (Stein, 51) Meena, indeed, is courageous enough to face him. She has the opportunity to talk to Sam after he has raped Anita, who consequently disappears to chase after her little sister, who has seen everything, is scared and ran away to look for help.

Sam and Meena stay there alone. Meena does not trust Sam any more but Sam's feelings remain the same and when he sees that Meena is uncertain about talking to him, he encourages her: "Come out! I ain't gonna hurt yow, I promise." (Syal, 312) And he really means it. Meena takes it as opportunity to tell Sam what she really thinks about him, prepared to defend her family and her ethnicity. However, Sam still does not understand. He is aware of the fact that he insulted the dark-skinned minority but he tries to explain Meena that when he said 'them', he never meant her. He meant all the others but not her. (Syal, 313) Meena replies that she, actually, is the others. (Syal, 314) Sam does not seem to understand the point but he does something that puts Meena in the position she always wanted to be. He kisses her but the kiss itself is not the point of Meena's victory, it is the meaning of the whole situation. Meena explains her feelings of a personal victory as follows:

And then he kissed me like I thought he would, and I let him, feeling mighty and huge, knowing I had won and that every time he saw another Meena on a street corner he would remember this and feel totally powerless." (Syal, 314)

She "establishes her superiority over Sam" and she, basically, "succeeds in turning Sam's stereotypical view of Indians against himself. (Stein, 51)

Later, when the author describes Meena's thoughts, there are significant changes obvious in Meena's way of thinking:

I climbed into the bed and for the first time in years, said a prayer. I told God I was sorry for blaming Pinky and Baby for stealing Mr Ormerod's tin and I wished

fervently that they were lying next to me in their matching pyjamas and coordinated bed socks, listening to me telling them about Sam, because I knew that they would understand. (Syal, 274)

All the unpleasant situations Meena has experienced recently make her realize who truly loves her, who does not and to whom she is truly important. Meena realizes that in situations like these she returns back to her own family and community because she feels safe there.

5. Family and the values that Meena returns to in the end

5.1 Nanima

Meena, as a second generation immigrant, cannot be blamed for the previous lack of interest and enthusiasm for the culture of her parents. India seems to be almost mythical and unreal to her and that is also why she has inclined towards England because unlike India, England is present and tangible.

Due to the previous racist attacks, Meena is confused because the culture she inclined towards at the beginning of the story disappointed her and made her escape back to her parents where she felt safe. She was, on the other hand, not prepared to accept her parents' culture fully.

Meena's parents are disappointed about England as well and they invite Meena's grandmother to come to visit them from India. Meena's grandmother, called Nanima in Punjabi, represents an imaginary bond connecting Meena and India. Nanima embodies the country of origin of Meena's family and she reminds Meena of her real roots. Nanima might be perceived as an important link that is putting the whole family back together again. She is deepening especially the relationship between Meena and her mum:

Papa lined the three of us up for the photograph, daughter, mother and grandmother, all of us the product of each other, like Russian dolls, that it struck me how difficult it must have been for mama to leave Nanima and how lonely she must have been [...] I vowed then that I would never leave her, this wrenching of daughter from mother would never happen again (Syal, 201-202)

For Meena, Nanima symbolizes the beginnings of her growing up process, but from a very different point of view than Anita or Sam do. Meena has been looking for her identity and place she would belong to throughout the whole book. After Sam and Anita's foul behaviour and Nanima's arrival, Meena subconsciously returns to the place where she feels safe; she returns home to her family.

Nanima makes Meena feel stronger and prepared to defend her family and everything they represent. She proves so while shopping with Nanima. Meena suspects Mr Ormerod that he tried to cheat Nanima, because she is an easy target since she

cannot even speak English properly. Meena says she was literally “waiting so long for this moment.” (Syal, 224) She faces Mr Ormerod and even though it shows that he did not cheat Nanima after all, Meena finds courage and raises her voice to defend someone from her family. Meena is actually able and strong enough to face someone older, cunning and armed with insincerity. She is fighting along with her childlike honesty and even though she cannot win over Mr Ormerod, she has already won over herself.

Thanks to observing the relationship between her mum and Nanima, Meena realizes the real reasons why her parents left their home country and even though they miss it, they do not want to go back. Meena is, basically, the main reason. Her mum explains Meena the reasons for their immigration:

At least in this country, you can get to the top university without having to pay a thousand greedy officials to get there. That’s why we had to leave, we were poor and clever, a bad combination in India.” (Syal, 212)

Meena does not understand why would her parents study a university at their age but mum explains her that everything they have done, they have done it for them, for her and her little brother. (Syal, 213) Thanks to observing Nanima and Meena’s mum’s difficult situation when both women cannot see each other very often and a big part of the world is parting them, Meena realizes how easy her situation actually is. She does not have to start again, she was already born in the new country and although she has some difficulties to fit in, still it is not as difficult as it must have been for her parents. They started from the very beginning and there was no one to help them. Therefore, the Kumars are very strict concerning Meena’s education. Meena’s Eleven-plus exam is, in fact, not only an entrance exam to the grammar school but it also stands for the justification for Meena’s parents’ sacrifice. (Syal, 306) Meena perceives it in the same way: “If I failed, my parents’ five thousand mile journey would have all been for nothing.” (Syal, 213)

5.2 Double Identity

Meena’s parents’ beginnings in England might have been difficult but they were able to develop a certain double identity that would enable them to survive in the new and completely different surroundings. Ulla Ambursley explains that “Meena’s mother

has two identities, one as the professional schoolteacher and the other, the perfect Indian housewife.” (2006, 12) Such image of Meena’s parents can help Meena to realize her own possibilities to mix two identities together and to create a new, unique one. Meena’s mum advises Meena to “take the best from their [English] culture, not the worst.” (Syal, 53) Meena can pick the best from both worlds and put it together in order to create an identity that would combine carefully chosen features. She finally understands the basis of the whole process. Meena is “most impressed that Sunil [Meena’s brother] was a bilingual baby” and she regrets “that Nanima had not been around when I [Meena] was learning to talk”. (Syal, 264)

Meena starts appreciating the advantages of a twofold cultural background. She finds out that she can have something from both worlds and create her own unique identity. Ulla Ambursley states that the situation which Meena is in “can create more opportunities for the development of the individual’s identity but they can also lead to complications to the process.” (2006, 3) However, Meena is willing to try both cultures in order to find out where her place is. (Bubíková, 174) She finally finds out that the “grey area between all categories” truly is her home and that there is nothing wrong about it. (Syal, 149-150)

Dr. Bubíková has written that there are many child protagonists who perceive their looking for identity and their diversity as very difficult and “rather than embracing it, they often face it as a need for an either-or choice.” (2010, 175) She perceives the combination of both cultures as the best solution to the confusion. Dr. Bubíková is also of the opinion that since Meena manages to take something from both cultures, she suddenly finds out she can be “at home anywhere, that she is strong enough to be on her own, to become an adult.” (2010, 175)

Meena, in fact, represents a certain embodiment of the *Anita and Me’s* author, Meera Syal, in her childhood years. Meera Syal put many of her feelings, experiences and thoughts into the character of Meena. Meera Syal identifies herself with Meena and when Meera talks about looking for her own identity, her thoughts are similar to Meena’s and vice versa. Meera Syal certainly came through the period, while growing up, when she wanted to fit the working class society of the village of Essington, where she grew up. (Jones, 2003) Nevertheless, she came to conclusion that “fitting in meant forgetting who I was”. (Jones, 2003) She eventually found out that diversity was what

made her so “interesting and unique”. She calls such bouncing between two cultures a “cultural schizophrenia” but she grasps it with optimism of her own saying that all these diversities caused her “whole generation sparky and creative”. (Jones, 2003)

Lydia Slater quotes Meera expressing her feelings about not only standing always somewhere between two different cultures but also feeling distant and separate from the rest of her peers. Meera, again, perceives it as an advantage and literally a “gift”, since it “gives you an ability to stand back and see the bigger picture”. (Slater, 2008)

One of the most important symbols of Meena’s new perception of her situation is mentioned almost at the end of the book. It is ironic that what made her scared at the beginning, makes her strong at the end. The mysterious Big House, after revealing its secrets, becomes one of the most important impulses for Meena to pluck up courage again and to work hard on her dreams to come true. When Meena finds out that the house is owned by an Indian man and his French wife, it “provides Meena with confidence in her potential for success because she can identify with this man resembling her father”. (Stein, 52) To the village, the Big House symbolizes a mystic and bewitched place. However, to Meena, it symbolizes that even as a girl with an Indian background, she can achieve something in England.

Mark Stein suggests that even though Meena positions herself into a British girl with a Punjabi background, he rather describes her as a British Asian girl. (2004, 52) It is a certain role that Meena did not choose by herself but it was given to her. According to Ulla Ambursley, Meena’s family “experiences that they are accepted when they recognize the particular role given to them.” (2006, 31) They cannot be perceived as the English, not even Meena. Even though she has a Midlands accent, the colour of her skin deceives her and she will always be perceived as a British Asian girl. Meena, however, does not protest in the end and she is, after all, able to reconcile with who she is and where she is going. She, at the end of the book, explains her feelings as: “I floated back down into my body which, for the first time ever, fitted me to perfection and was all mine.” (Syal, 326)

Meena has already managed to walk a great distance on her life journey. The experience that she came across forced her to realize that there is a great difference between her dreams and the reality. She says: “I was having to learn the difference between acting and being – and it hurt.” (Syal, 289) She has to learn that she cannot

fight everything and everyone and that maturity is not about fighting and winning all the time only. In her case, there is not a fair chance of winning anyway. Meena remembers her “parents to swallow down anger and grief million times for our [their] sakes, for the sakes of other watching, for the sake of their own sanity”. (Syal, 288) Once she is able to understand her parents’ actions and behaviour and once she is able to accept it, she feels “six week older and a lifetime wiser” and she feels she is growing up. (Syal, 287)

6. Resumé

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá studiem druhé generace imigrantů ve Velké Británii v šedesátých letech dvacátého století. K této problematice se váže i hlavní zdroj této práce, a to román *Anita and Me* [*Anita a já*], jehož autorkou je Meera Syal. Meera Syal je sama součástí druhé generace imigrantů a její kniha je z velké části považována za autobiografické dílo. Meera Syal vyrůstala stejně jako hlavní hrdinka knihy, Meena Kumar, v malé vesnici nedaleko Wolverhamptonu a setkávala se s podobnými situacemi a problémy.

Aby bylo možno podrobněji rozvinout druhou generaci imigrantů ve Velké Británii, je potřeba nejprve přiblížit dobu, ve které se kniha Meery Syal odehrává. Jedním z ústředních činitelů této doby se pro Velkou Británii stal bezpochyby Enoch Powell, politik za Konzervativní stranu, který byl v období mezi roky 1960 až 1963 i ministrem zdravotnictví. V posledním roce své funkce se rozhodl pozvat do Velké Británie kvalifikované doktory z Indie, aby tím pomohl stagnujícímu britskému zdravotnictví a vyplnil tak hlavně personální mezery.

Vzápětí jsou ovšem zmíněny události, které se odehrály o pár let později téhož desetiletí, kdy již zmíněný Enoch Powell pronesl v roce 1968 řeč, která se stala jednou z jeho nejkontroverznějších řečí, *Rivers of Blood speech* [Řeč o proudech krve], přestože nebyla první tohoto druhu

Tento projev otevřeně kritizuje imigraci do Velké Británie. Powell byl schopen použít i nelichotivá slova, která byla mířena především proti imigrantům tmavé barvy pleti. Enoch Powell svým způsobem tvrdí, že někteří imigranti ani nemají šanci se přizpůsobit danému prostředí už kvůli odlišné barvě pleti. Obecně by se dalo shrnout, že imigraci vnímá jako škodlivou především pro britskou společnost, jak pro její kulturu, tak i pro její tradice.

Powellova řeč je o to kontroverznější, protože si evidentně protiřečí s jeho rozhodnutími, které učinil v roce 1963. Krok, který Powell na začátku šedesátých let učinil, však nevnímá jako podporu imigrace. Powell indické doktory naopak ospravedlňuje, protože přijet do Velké Británie nebylo jejich vlastní rozhodnutí, nýbrž přijali pozvání Enocha Powella jakožto tehdejšího ministra zdravotnictví.

Pozorovatelé celé situace se nicméně často pozastavují nad pravými úmysly Enocha Powella, které ho vedly k tak zjevně protikladným názorům a k takové náhlé změně myšlení. Někteří se domnívají, že hnacím motorem jeho úmyslů a pravým důvodem, proč se rozhodl přednést *Rivers of Blood speech* [Řeč o proudech krve], byla touha po politické moci a snaha zalíbit se veřejnosti, ve které přetrvávala všeobecná, ale nevyslovená nevráživost vůči rostoucímu počtu imigrantů.

S těmito názory ovšem nesouhlasí Robert Shepherd, životopisec Enocha Powella, a historik Peter Brook, kteří Powella hájí tím, že Powellovy obavy z imigrace jsou způsobeny právě jeho bohatými zkušenostmi z Indie, kterou si mimochodem velice oblíbil. Powell se však podle nich obával příliš velikého rozdílu mezi oběma kulturami, tedy jak britskou tak nově příchozí kulturou imigrantů. V souvislosti s indickou kulturou se obával toho, že by mohla vnést do britského individualismu příliš komunalismu, což by podle Powella mohlo podstatně oslabit britskou demokracii.

Jako řešení navrhl Enoch Powell repatriaci a asistované návraty imigrantů do země jejich původu. Jeho návrh ovšem nepočítal s dětmi imigrantů. Druhá generace imigrantů představuje děti, které se již narodily v zemi, kam jejich rodiče emigrovali. Tyto děti považují novou zemi za svůj domov a země, odkud pochází jejich rodiče, jim zpravidla nic neříká. Pokud Powell navrhoval poslat imigranty zpět do země jejich původu, situace prakticky nemá řešení, protože jediné, co děti imigrantů narozené ve Velké Británii znají, je Velká Británie, která pro ně zároveň představuje domov. Je pro ně tedy téměř nepředstavitelné považovat za domov jinou zemi, kterou většina z nich v životě ani nenavštívila.

Děti imigrantů jsou také jedním z hlavních témat primárního literárního zdroje této práce, knihy *Anita and Me* [Anita a já], která již byla zmíněna výše. Analytická část této bakalářské práce se zabývá především hledáním identity zmíněné druhé generace imigrantů. Identita, něco tak základního a samozřejmého pro mnoho dětí, které vyrůstají v zemi svých rodičů, se může stát takřka neuchopitelnou pro děti imigrantů. Jejich rodiče vyznávají jinou kulturu a dodržují jiné zvyky než vrstevníci jejich dětí. Děti imigrantů jsou zmatené, nejsou si jisté kam patří, kudy se mají vydat na cestě životem a kam vlastně směřují.

Práce cituje několik myšlenek a názorů, které nahlíží na identitu jako na něco pohyblivého, proměnného a otevřeného dalšímu vývoji. Identita je ovlivňována mnoha

faktory a aspekty. Ačkoliv se téměř jistě vyvíjí spolu s jedincem, pro někoho je identita přímočařejší a srozumitelnější než pro někoho jiného, pro něhož může být identita na druhou stranu komplikovanější a složitější.

Meena Kumar, hlavní hrdinka knihy *Anita and Me* [Anita a já], patří k takové generaci a analytická část této práce je postavena především na postavě Meeny. Meena Kumar je zmatená ohledně své identity a není si úplně jistá tím, kam přesně patří. Cítí se pod tlakem a má pocit, že si musí vybrat jeden ze dvou světů, mezi kterými balancuje. Rozhodne se tedy celou situaci řešit tím, že se přikloní k tomu, co je jí v jejím věku a v období začínající adolescence bližší, tedy ke svým anglickým vrstevníkům. Snaží se spřátelit s o několik let starší Anitou Rutter. Anita pro Meenu představuje všechno, čím si Meena zoufale přeje být. Anita má blondřaté vlasy, je vyzývavá a suverénní. Má téměř neomezené množství svobody a rodiče ji příliš nekontrolují, jako to dělají například rodiče Meeny. Pro Meenu je Anita ztělesněním dospělosti, síly, odvahy, dokonalosti a také ztělesněním samotné Anglie. Meena obecně vzato cítí, že pokud ji bude Anita akceptovat nebo dokonce mít ráda, bude ji mít ráda i Anglie. Meena se odvrací od kultury svých indických rodičů, protože jí přijde neatraktivní, nepopulární a zastaralá. Začátek analytické části této práce se zabývá především Meeninou nekonečnou náklonností k Anitě. Meena je přesvědčená, že její štěstí leží výhradně v Anitiných rukách a že její identita spočívá v tom být dost „anglická”.

Jenže čím déle Meena Anitu zná, tím více zjišťuje, že Anitin život není přesně tím, co Meena hledala. Meena se pomalu dozvídá o domácím prostředí, ve kterém se Anita pohybuje a zjišťuje, že příliš svobody, na první pohled přátelské vztahy s matkou a suverénní chování, jsou vlastně jen výsledkem zanedbané výchovy a nedostatečné péče ze strany rodičů. Meeně se pomalu hroubí její představa o dokonalé Anitě a o dokonalém světě a začíná pochybovat o tom, zda právě Anita je ten nejlepší vzor, který by chtěla následovat.

Meena si začíná uvědomovat, jak odlišná Anita je a vždy bude. Nejen, že se Meena nikdy nezbaví barvy své pleti, ale také se vždy bude odlišovat od Anity společenskou třídou a myšlením. Zatímco Anita se narodila do pracovní třídy, Meena pochází z rodiny, která se pohybuje spíše ve střední třídě. Třídní rozdíly a možnosti obou dívek nejsou v tomto případě určeny ani tak finančně, jako spíše vzděláním.

Anitino vzdělání, stejně tak její vzdělávací možnosti, se vůbec nedají srovnat s možnostmi Meeny. Vzdělání, které má Meena díky rodičům umožněno, Meeně jednoho dne pomůže vymanit se z identity dítěte imigrantů, stejně jako z pracovní třídy Tollingtonu a posunout se ve společenském měřítku výš. V tom se zásadně liší od většiny svých vrstevníků žijících v Tollingtonu, jejichž rodiče jsou sami uvězněni v pracovní třídě, a protože sami neznají nic jiného, ani svým dětem nemohou nabídnout víc. Anita, stejně jako Sam a Anitina matka moc dobře vidí rozdíl mezi nimi a mezi rodinou Meeny, ale nedokážou pochopit, v čem tento rozdíl spočívá.

Meeně k jejímu přání splynout s Anglií a být Angličankou nepřidává ani fakt, že její barva pleti je silným argumentem proti jejím idealistickým představám. Barva pleti ji totiž odlišuje od společnosti, ve které se pohybuje, víc než cokoli jiného. Ve většině případech je to to první, čeho si na ní cizí lidé všimnou. Sousedé a přátelé berou Meenu takovou, jaká je a ve své podstatě už si ani neuvědomují rozdíly, které mezi nimi a Meenou jsou. Meena bezchybně hovoří místním nářečím a její slovní zásoba je stejná jako u ostatních anglických adolescentů, což ale cizí lidé na první pohled nevidí, a proto ji soudí pouze podle prvního dojmu, který říká, že je dítě indických rodičů, pravděpodobně imigrantů. Meenu možná přijmou lidé z nejbližšího okolí, kteří jsou také schopni brát ji takovou, jaká doopravdy je, ale aby ji přijala celá společnost, k tomu je potřeba větší tolerance a trpělivosti, nejlépe z obou stran.

Meena si časem začne uvědomovat, že s jejím přátelstvím s Anitou a jejími kamarády je něco v nepořádku. Jako by mluvili každý úplně jiným jazykem a v tomto případě nepochybně hraje roli jak výchova a rodinné zázemí, tak i přirozená inteligence. Nedostatek inteligence a také nedostatek schopnosti vnímat události v širším kontextu a předpovídat případné následky, se vzápětí projeví u Anity a Sama Lowbridge, místního adolescenta, který se v průběhu knihy přidá ke skupině skinheadů. Právě Sam je tím, který bez toho, aby přemýšlel nad možnými následky, nevybíravým jazykem veřejně protestuje proti věnování vybraných peněz na charitu, nejlépe na charitu pro africké země, přičemž svůj protest zakončuje rasistickou narážkou na obyvatele černé barvy pleti, mezi které se řadí i Meena a celá její rodina. Anita Samův otevřený slovní útok nepřímou podporuje, ačkoliv si to sama zřejmě ani neuvědomuje a Sama spíše obdivuje pro jeho odvalu veřejně se vyjádřit, než pro obsah jeho sdělení.

Meena si ale závažnost celé situace uvědomuje velice dobře a i když je velice zklamaná, ví, že přátelství s Anitou je tímto ohroženo, ne-li ztraceno. Meena, vychovaná rodiči k lásce a toleranci je ochotna Anitě odpustit, ale jen do doby, kdy se dozví pravdu o šokujícím incidentu v sousedství. Sam Lowbridge a jeho přátelé zmlátí Inda a Anita nejen, že přihlíží, ale ještě považuje celou událost za projev moci, síly a Samovy ‚lásky‘ k ní. Meena poté, co spatří, kdo Anita doopravdy je a spatří ji v pravém světle, uvědomí si zároveň, kde leží její vlastní hodnoty, stejně tak jako její hrdost spolu s její pravou identitou.

Meena v sobě najde veškerou odvahu a konfrontuje Sama osobně. Snaží se mu vysvětlit, že ubližováním komukoliv z indické komunity je jako ubližovat jí samé. Sam toto ovšem není schopen pochopit. Bere Meenu tak, jak si ona vždy přála, jako samostatnou bytost oddělenou od komunity svých rodičů. Meena ale od té doby dospěla a ve chvíli, kdy ji Sam bere jako samostatnou bytost, Meena cítí, že je to tak špatně a začíná si uvědomovat, kam skutečně patří.

Meenin návrat k rodině a k tomu, co její rodina reprezentuje, mnohonásobně usnadní návštěva babičky, která za nimi přijede až z Indie. Meena, která s Indií nemá žádné velké vazby, díky babičce začne více chápat své rodiče. Babička totiž představuje pomyslný most mezi Indií a Meenou a zároveň je také pojátkem, které napraví narušené vztahy Meeny a její rodiny, především vztah Meeny a její maminky.

Meena se vrací k rodině, tedy ke všemu, co se kvůli Anitě snažila zahodit. Vrací se k rodině, protože se cítí zranitelná okolním světem a ví, že rodina ji bez jakýchkoliv námitek přijme zpět, podpoří ji, ochrání a dodá energii k dalším životním krokům. Meena, spolu s těmito kroky a překážkami, které ji potkávají, dospívá a spolu s dospíváním nachází i počátky své zprvu nejisté identity. Uvědomuje si, že identita, z níž měla celou dobu pocit, že ji musí najít buď ve světě svých vrstevníků nebo ve světě svých rodičů, se nachází někde uprostřed, v kombinaci obou světů.

Meena se musí naučit, že za svůj původ se není třeba stydět a že je třeba brát věci tak, jak přicházejí. Je důležité a nezbytné umět najít i na negativních věcech něco pozitivního, poučit se a jít dál.

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