Think of five ways to describe who Meena is. For example:

1. Meena is a nine year old child who lives in the Midlands. Her surroundings are described on page 12 with: ‘From the crest of the hill, on a clear day, you could see the industrial chimneys of Wolverhampton …’

2. 

3. 

4. 

5. 

Now think of five ways which show how Meena is affected by people or places around her. For example:

1. Meena becomes aware of racism when she goes to the village fête. The following quotation demonstrates this: ‘I felt as if I had been punched in the stomach. My legs felt watery and a hot panic softened my insides to mush. It was as if the whole crowd had turned into one huge eyeball which swivelled slowly between me and papa.’
Now read this extract from page 165:

But if Tollington was a footnote in the book of the Sixties, then my family and friends were the squashed flies in the spine. According to the newspapers and television, we simply did not exist. If a brown or black face ever did appear on TV, it stopped us all in our tracks. “Daljit! Quick!” papa would call, and we would crowd round and coo over the walk-on in some detective series, some long-suffering actor in a gaudy costume with a goodness-gracious-me accent. (“So Mr. Templar, you speak fluent Hindustani too! But that won’t stop me stealing the secret formula for my country from where I will soon rule the world! Heh heh heh …”) and welcome him into our house like a long-lost relative. But these occasional minor celebrities never struck me as real; they were someone else’s version of Indian, far too exaggerated and exotic to be believable. Sometimes I wondered if the very act of shutting our front door transported us onto another planet, where non-related elders were called Aunties and Uncles and talked in rapid Punjabi, which their children understood but answered back in broad Black Country slang, where we ate food with our fingers and discussed family feuds happening five thousand miles away, where manners were so courtly that a raised eyebrow could imply an insult, where sensibilities were so finely tuned that an advert featuring a woman in a bikini could clear a room.

Just as Meena is a person who has roles to play, and a personality of her own, the Indian community also has roles, personalities and an identity of its own.

Write down examples of what the Indian community is like when they have ‘shut their front door’, and are inside their own houses:

On the other side of the door is the outside world. It affects the community in a number of different ways. Explain the ways in your own words by answering the following questions:

How do newspapers and television affect the Indian community?
On both a personal level and as a member of a community Meena feels she is living two lives.

Using the work you have already done, answer the following questions:

1. From this extract, what do you learn about living in two cultures?  
   Use evidence from the extract to support your answer.

2. Explain how the writer presents differences between the two cultures in the extract.  
   Use evidence to support your answer.

3. Explore the significance of differences between the cultures in one other part of the novel. Refer to the social and cultural context in your answer.