

My son the fanatic

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My son the fanatic The generation gap is a dilemma which frequently occurs among immigrants, and in his short story My son the fanatic, Hanif Kureishi brings up the issue concerned. Kureishi introduces us to a father, who's alarmed and puzzled by his sons' strange behavior, which proves out to be against his own values. During this, Kureishi touches on the topics fanaticism and religion, and how these can change ones behavior towards onesfamily. Kureishi also focuses on how people relate to their roots.

The main character in the story is Parvez, who's a good example of an immigrant being well-integrated. He emigrated from Pakistan, where he was taught the Koran. He underwent indignity during this, and subsequently he avoided all religion; he even prefers jokes to rules. Even though he has a wife and a son, he spends most of his time " living a boy's life" with his fellow taxi drivers; playing card and avoiding their wives. The narration of the story is 3rd person narrative and is therefore limited, but we see the conflict from Parvez's point of view, which engenders surprises. Parvez sprang across the hall and set his ear at Ali's door. A muttering sound came from within (...) The boy was praying. "(l. 130-134) Besides eating bacon and playing cards, another example of Parvez not being very Muslim is that he knows a prostitute, Bettina. Together they have deep talks; something Parvez wasn't able to have with his own wife. It is also Bettina who helps Parvez figuring out what's going on with his son, f. ex. " He knew what to look for: Bettina had drawn pictures"(l. 103-104) and " Reluctantly he and Bettina had abandoned their only explanation"(l. 18-119) " Surreptitiously, the father began going into his son's bedroom"(l. 1). As early as the first line, the story pictures a father (Parvez) who struggles with something. Ali, the

son of Parvez, acts differently and queerly, and his new tidy conduct scares Parvez who “ was aware that he had become slightly afraid of his son, who, between his silences was developing a sharp tongue” (l. 15-17) Ali has also become very obscure and mystical, and an example of a cryptic remark of Ali is “ There are more important things to be done” (l. 9) The teenage son Ali is going through a huge change. Formerly, he was well-integrated like his father, and they understood each other. As Parvez said: “ we were brothers!” (l. 56) But at some point Ali decided to distance himself from the British/western world; he threw out his material goods and dissociate himself from his old friends and girlfriend. Among other things, computer disks and videotape are mentioned as Alis discarded things, and this indicates that the story takes place in our time.

Furthermore, the setting is placed among the lower part of the middle-class, since Parvez is a taxi-driver, and they are immigrants. Furthermore, the relationship between Parvez and his son is slightly crumbling, especially when Parvez finds out that his son has chosen the opposite view of life than himself; Ali has become very religious, and Parvez is puzzled and concerned and doesn't know how to deal with this. “ But he's growing a beard”(l. 115) is the first sign Parvez intercepts and exclaims to Bettina.

Henceforth, the conflict whether it's wrong or right to blame ones son for becoming religious blossoms. Additionally, the relationship between the two of them worsens; Ali returns his fathers long and curious looks with “ a hint of criticism, of reproach” (l. 111-112) and Ali acts “ as if he hated his father” (l. 194) ““Don't you know it's wrong to drink alcohol? ’ Ali said” (l. 177). One of the most important passages is the restaurant scene with Parvez and Ali,

because until this scene, we have only been following Parvez's angle of the matter.

Ali has been very introverted, but at this point we have Ali's interior thoughts revealed; Ali blames his father for being "too implicated in Western civilization" (l. 218) and for having broken the rules of the Koran, which he means should be followed to the letter, for "the reward will be in Paradise" (l. 238). To this statement, Parvez feels puzzled and exasperated. But when Ali announces that he's giving up his study, and especially after Ali has shown disrespect towards Bettina (which you can interpret as Ali insulting Parvez's lifestyle), Parvez can't handle the problem anymore.

Thus the short story ends up in a climax; Parvez beats Ali up while he's praying, whereupon Ali says: "So who's the fanatic now" (l. 392). "Parvez had been telling Bettina that he thought people in the West sometimes felt inwardly empty and needed a philosophy to live by" (l. 310). This could be one of the reasons why the emerging problem between Parvez and Ali arises. The struggle is basically caused by the generation gap, which leads us to the central conflict; the two of them simply don't understand each other.

Especially Parvez doesn't get his son's sudden change in values, and doesn't understand why Ali rejects the Western world, simply because it's not compatible with the Muslim way of life. The development of the relationship between Ali and Parvez is the main focus, and with integration as a theme, Kureishi deliberates and construes "the gap generation". Where the older generation has lived out their dream of freedom, the younger generation grows up with much wider opportunities in life and all this freedom makes them search for guidelines.

They might have experienced the more unpleasant and cruel side of the Western culture, seeing that they have been different to their surroundings, growing up. That is why some of them find that religion binds 2nd generation immigrants together. Touching on this, Kureish sets forth his view on religion as a selected/rejected thing, which in cases can lead to the stage of fanaticism; both for the religious ones, who we are easy to claim fanatic. But Kureish also portrays the more neglected ones; those, who so hardly fight against religion and refuse their background. Because they have a special opinion on how life should be lived, too.