



NORTHERN VOICES

My Son the Fanatic

My Son the Fanatic

Director: Udayan Prasad
©: Son of Zephyr Limited
Production Companies: Zephyr Films, BBC Films, UGC Droits Audiovisuels, Arts Council of England
Executive Producer: George Faber
Producer: Chris Curling
Line Producer: Anita Overland
Production Accountant: Jim Hajicosta
Accounts Assistant: Clive Osborne
Production Co-ordinator: Ann Lynch
Production Manager: Philip Robertson
Location Manager: Mark Stephenson
Location Liaison: Michael Harm
Assistant Location Manager: Sam Taylor
Location Assistant: Carn Burton
Post-production Supervisor: Alistair Hopkins
Producer's Assistant: Pippa Best
Production Assistant: Andy Stebbing
Production Secretary: Jo Barker
Production Runner: Suk Sahota
Researcher: Yaseen Rahman
1st Assistant Director: Nick Laws
2nd Assistant Director: John Bremer
3rd Assistant Director: John Withers
Script Supervisor: Emma Thomas
Casting: Simone Ireland, Vanessa Pereira
Crowd Casting: Aisha Wazir
Screenplay: Hanif Kureishi
Based on a short story by: Hanif Kureishi
Director of Photography: Alan Almond
Focus Puller: John Bremer
2nd Unit Focus Puller: Camillo Spath
Grip: Richard Davies
Camera Trainee: Damon Randall
Low Loader Operator: Clive Noy
Stills Photographer: Joth Shakerly
Special Effects: Ian Rowley, Steve Breheney, Dougie Robson
Editor: David Gamble
1st Assistant Editor: Kate Buckland
Production Designer: Grenville Horner
Art Directors: Colin Blaymires, Sarah Kane
Production Buyer: Dominic Smithers
Props Master: Andy Ludford
Standby Props: Ross Wilson, Ashley Stones
Dressing Props: Brian Sayce
Costume Designer: Mary-Jane Reyner
Costume Supervisor: Sandra Milman
Make-up Designer: Penny Smith
Opticals/Titles: Cine Image
Original Music: Stephen Warbeck
Music Performed by: Iain Ballamy, B.K. Chandrashekhar, Paul Clarvis, Stuart Hall, John Parricelle, Martin Robertson, Ralph Salmins, Huw Warren
Music Recordist/Mixer: Steve Parr
Music Recorded/Mixed @: Hear No Evil Studios (London)
Music Consultant: Charlie Gillett
Sound Recordist: Albert Bailey
Re-recording Mixer: Adrian Rhodes
Post-production: De Lane Lea
Boom Operator: Dick Philip
Sound Maintenance: Anne Dodsworth
Supervising Sound Editor: Nick Adams
Assistant Sound Editor: Paul Wrightson
Dialogue Editor: Tim Hands
FX Editor: Sam Southwick
ADR Editor: Gordon Brown
Foley Editor: Imogen Pollard
Negative Cutter: Sylvia Wheeler
Grader: Colin Coull

Written by Hanif Kureishi from his own short story, *My Son the Fanatic* was the first British feature film to tackle what was already a subject of growing importance in the wake of the Salman Rushdie/ *The Satanic Verses* affair, several years before the events of 11 September 2001 made it impossible to ignore or dismiss as a minor cultural phenomenon. Although Kureishi ultimately offers no solution to the conflict between secular Western and hardline Islamic values, he does at least acknowledge the validity and substance of the underlying issues – and treats them in a notably balanced way.

Despite their seemingly irreconcilable opposition, father and son Parvez (Om Puri) and Farid (Akbar Kurtha) have more in common than otherwise. Both are uncomfortable with their native cultures (Pakistani in Parvez's case, British in Farid's), both are swayed by the malign influence of foreign father-figures (the sleazy German businessman Schitz; the Islamic holy man whom Farid invites into the family home), and both seek solace in a form of spiritual communion – in Parvez's case, his worship of the prostitute Bettina (Rachel Griffiths) from afar, his much-vaunted 'respect for women' preventing him from making the first move.

But where they differ is their attitude towards integrating with their surroundings. Here, Kureishi inverts the usual stereotype by presenting father Parvez as the liberal (though he retains traditional views on children respecting their parents) while Farid seeks to cleanse the town of immorality. His stated reason for turning to religion is out of his disgust at the way modern life derives from 'empty accountancy', whether expressed through consumerism or prostitution (Schitz has interests in both professions), and although the film is largely seen through Parvez's increasingly bewildered eyes, Kureishi ensures that Farid's position is given a fair hearing.

Ultimately, both Parvez and Farid are clinging on to imaginary utopias. Parvez has a vision of a tolerant Britain which is undermined by experience (most directly by the club comedian singling him out for racist abuse), while Farid similarly dreams of an equally imaginary Pakistan, where pure Islamic values hold sway. Their inability to reconcile their ideas both with each other and with the outside world (and with wife/mother Minoo, unwillingly trapped between the warring pair) gives the film an authentically tragic edge. Like director Udayan Prasad's earlier *Brothers in Trouble* (1995), the ending is tantalisingly open – but unlike that film, there's little sign that it's especially upbeat.

Michael Brooke, BFI Screenonline, screenonline.org.uk

Offering an explanation to his father Parvez of why he broke off his engagement to a white girl, Farid explains that 'you can't mix keema and strawberries'. It's a fittingly domestic metaphor for *My Son the Fanatic*, Udayan Prasad's follow-up to *Brothers in Trouble*, in which cooking and western-Asian relations were also central. Written by Hanif Kureishi and based on his own short story, the film follows the transformation of Farid from would-be accountant to fervent fundamentalist through the eyes of Parvez.

Parvez, however, is not a simple 'assimilated Asian', there merely to counterpoint his increasingly zealous Islamic son. Indeed, he views Farid's broken engagement as filial disobedience, a challenge to his position as master

Stunt Co-ordinator: Clive Curtis
Dialogue Coach: Joan Washington
Unit Publicists: Undine Marshfield,
Cowan Symes & Associates
Studio: Ealing Studios

Cast:

Om Puri (*Parvez*)
Rachel Griffiths (*Bettina*)
Stellan Skarsgård (*Schitz*)
Akbar Kurtha (*Farid*)
Gopi Desai (*Minoa*)
Harish Patel (*Fizzy*)
Bhasker Patel (*The Maulvi*)
Sarah Jane Potts (*Madelaine Fingerhut*)
Judi Jones (*Mrs Fingerhut*)
Geoffrey Bateman (*Chief Inspector Fingerhut*)
Bernard Wrigley (*drunk man*)
Moya Brady (*druggie prostitute*)
Badi Uzzaman (*man in mosque*)
Andy Devine (*comedian*)
Shiv Grewal (*waiter*)
Omar Salimi (*Rashid*)
Dev Sagoo (*taxi controller*)
Rowena King (*Margot*)
Olwen May, Alison Burrows (*prostitutes*)
Parvez Qadir, Shakher Bassi (*acolytes*)
Balraj Singh Somal, Rez Kempton (*drivers*)
UK/France 1997©
87 mins

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of his own home. But when a *maulvi* (an Islamic holy man) and his acolytes arrive at Farid's invitation, the social space of the house and Parvez's place within it are transformed. Parvez's wife Minoa must eat separately from the men while Parvez's jazz records are drowned out by Koranic incantations. Meanwhile, as driver and fixer for the seedy visiting businessman Schitz, Parvez is forced into servility. Both Schitz and the *maulvi* are tourists and exploiters: the *maulvi*'s studied authenticity masks his bid for permanent UK residency, while Schitz's smoothness barely conceals violence.

Clearly, Kureishi and Prasad want to parallel the subordinated positions of Parvez and Bettina, the young white hooker he falls in love with. Moreover, for all the apparent unlikeliness of their relationship, this is in essence a very conventional love story, not unlike *The Crying Game* with its own seemingly mismatched protagonists. To play off this 'true love' against the tawdry world of Schitz, the sex party Parvez helps Schitz organise is shot like a cross between a pop video and a soft-porn film, and is contrasted with the privatising red blur that climaxes Bettina and Parvez's first sexual encounter.

However, what is particularly successful about *My Son the Fanatic* is its representation of fundamentalism as solidly modern. Radical Islamic politics are essentially bound up with youth, which functions, here as so often, as a signifier for the modern. The house overflows with fanatical young men. Parvez's final sight of his son, glimpsed from behind as he strides down a side street with his fellow acolytes, is a parody of 'laddism' – another contemporary form of gender separatism. The film thus avoids the common binary opposition which sets enlightened secularism against pre-modern fanaticism. And to further undermine this flawed binary, the film teems with seemingly inappropriate keema-and-strawberries juxtapositions. The *maulvi* giggles at kids' cartoons. Bettina the hooker snorts cocaine in suspenders with Schitz, but drinks tea in a tracksuit with Parvez. Juxtaposition of this kind is a signature of Kureishi's writing and is here, as elsewhere, the site of comedy. But it has a more general function in texts which explore cultural hybridity, such as *Bhaji on the Beach*. For Farid, such juxtapositions are undesirable. For Parvez and Bettina they are simply the complex conditions of living.

But romance also neutralises these complexities and the film is less able to explore the contemporary appeal of fundamentalism that it proposes. Parvez himself is ill-equipped to comprehend the attraction. But his and Farid's dissatisfactions are reactions to the same crisis. Love and religion are two forms of quest or escape. Both Parvez and Farid are trying to escape 'the empty accountancy of things': the son through religion, Parvez through his love for Bettina. For all the deliberate specificity of the film's context – this is a post-*Satanic Verses* world where stand-up comics make jokes about *fatwas* – love and religion are finally timeless absolutes. The romantic narrative, though it ends ambiguously, despecifies the contemporary. Prostitution may be a figure for capitalism but it is also the world's oldest profession. Love can be seen finally to parenthesise the complexities of contemporary culture, which are refigured as so much roughness in the way of it running its true course.

Rachel Malik, *Sight and Sound*, May 1998