

Generation Gap In Hatimu Aisyah By Zurinah Hassan: A Matter Of Emotional Distance

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Abstract: This research aims to discuss 'generation gap' as a matter of emotional distance, as portrayed in the novel Hatimu Aisyah by Zurinah Hassan. The term 'generation gap' is usually associated with the difference in beliefs, thoughts, values and tastes of two different generations, particularly between the old generations and the younger ones. The differences thus cause difficulties in communication, inflict conflicts, and furthermore, may initiate emotional distance between the two generations. The research outlines three objectives to achieve, (1) to identify the characters conflicting with the issues of generation gaps in Hatimu Aisyah by Zurinah Hassan; (2) to classify causes of conflicts pertaining the issues of generation gaps in Hatimu Aisyah by Zurinah Hassan, and (3) to relate the issues of generation gap with social changes in Hatimu Aisyah by Zurinah Hassan. This research employs close reading method. The primary source is the novel Hatimu Aisyah by Zurinah Hassan, first published by Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in 1991. The secondary sources include journals, books, articles, references or other sources that enable further understanding on the issues highlighted in the primary source. To clarify further on the issues of generation gaps, the research also employs the theory of Psychosocial Stages of Development by Eric H. Erikson. Erikson outlines eight confronting stages in one's life, namely (1) infant (basic trust vs basic mistrust), (2) toddler (autonomy vs shame & doubt), (3) preschooler (initiative vs guilt), (4) school-ager (industry vs inferiority), (5) adolescent (identity vs role confusion), (6) young adult (intimacy vs isolation), (7) middle age (generativity vs stagnation) and (8) older adult (ego-integrity vs despair). The results later indicate that there are four groups of people conflicting with the issues of generation gaps, each represented by Aisyah's mother (grandmother), Aisyah (mother), Jamilah, Latifah, Hamid, Aziz and Rohani (sons and daughters) and Azizah, Rodiah and Anisah (granddaughters). The causes of conflicts are due to perception of these generations on (1) the types of education they received, (2) the influence of modernization and (3) the decline of traditional customs. It is later clear that the more the younger generations accustomed to the social changes, the wider the gap would be expanded, thus the more possibilities emotional distance occur among the older generations who are still bound to the inheritance.

Keywords: generation gap, emotional distance, psychosocial stages, novel

1. INTRODUCTION

The term 'generation gap' is widely used to indicate the difference in thoughts, beliefs, values and tastes of two different generations separated by vast amount of age and distinguished by multiple lifestyles and orientations. As a result, the differences in one way of another may influence them on committing different assumptions, perceptions, paradigms, attitudes and behaviours, reflecting the social values and beliefs they are abound with [01]. Thus, the gap is becoming more obvious once the people are becoming older [02]. This may also occur due to the drastic changes of the standard of livings and lifestyles [03], [04]. Yet, people of these different generations still live in the same communities, make do with shared beings and labour at the same routines, no matter how they equip and perceive life differently. The issues of 'generation gap' is first known to the publics in 1960s as the then youngsters, a generation known as the Baby Boomer, implicate such a big gap on values and life perceptions when compared to those values and life perceptions traditionally belonged to their parents, known as Silent Generation, while initiating more changes to Generation X and Generation Y who emerge in the following decades [05] [05b]. Due to common

differences in age and life experience as well, the generations have gradually communicated less between each other, resulting in identity crises and the declines of family and social relationship [06] [07]. Disintegration in the family itself may cause the younger generations to seek help and advice from other sources, other than the elderlies, eventually shows internal conflicts between the generations even if they are still living under the same roof. Had the intense relationship relocated them into a more distance affair, then there would be a decadence of moral and traditional values among the youngsters [8]. However, as much as the youngsters want to be attached to the kins, they would still be less likely not to bother with the ongoing world. This thus would expand the issues of generation gap to another stage in the family itself.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Unlike the previous days, parents today tend to be closer with children. However, as good as many see this to bridging the gap, yet the latter may see this indifferently as their parents are still representing the old generation. Conflicts develop whence the parents would demand respects from the children, while at the same time keep implanting as many rules as possible to keep the family in total control [09]. The inability of the children to fulfil the demands, believing the parents too fussy and fastidious, however, simply widen the gap between the two generations [10]. This later leads the children to develop a new 'identity' of themselves by gathering more sources closer to their needs, and attracting outsiders of the same age who tend to form a generation they might belong to. The new 'identity', had it developed, must be different from the one that the parents have already done in the yesteryears [11]. The whole process of forming and developing the new 'identity' must be based on two basic necessities, known as 'inclusion' and 'differentiation' [12]. In other words, one needs to access his or her ability to engage with the group, before asserting his or her inner self with the group's beliefs, thoughts, values and tastes. The suitability to include oneself

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in the group, and to overcome the differences when necessary would ease the interaction among the members [13] [14]. At this point, the range of age is always seen to further constitute the notions of the new 'identity' which would be seen to belong to the so-called 'younger generation' [15]. Besides underlining the different patterns of lifestyles between those conflicting generations, age does matter in clarifying their distant beliefs, thoughts, values and tastes, thus manifesting generation gaps between them [16] [17] [18]. In a nut shell, the contrastive ideas of certain particular aspects pertaining generation gap will only prevail once every generation starts to show its preference on various things. The older generations here may prefer to those things they are attached to for so long, whereas the younger generations mostly keen to associate themselves in line with the current needs, necessities and lifestyles. Thus, different perceptions and preferences, in one way or another, sooner or later would cause conflicts to both groups due to various reasons, particularly the effect of current technology, modernisation and different perceptions in relationship [19].

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research aims to discuss the issues on generation gap as a matter of emotional distance, as illustrated in a Malay novel, *Hatimu Aisyah* (1991) by Zurinah Hassan [20]. The writer is a National Laureates of Malaysia and is well-known locally and internationally for her poems, short stories and novels. There are three objectives in this research; (1) to identify the characters conflicting with the issues of generation gaps in *Hatimu Aisyah* by Zurinah Hassan; (2) to classify causes of conflicts pertaining the issues of generation gaps in *Hatimu Aisyah* by Zurinah Hassan, and (3) to relate the issues of generation gap with social changes in *Hatimu Aisyah* by Zurinah Hassan. To achieve these objectives, the research would employ close reading and textual analysis methods. By employing close reading method, the research engages with the understanding of language and symbols in the text. *Hatimu Aisyah* tells a story about a Malay woman whose life undergoes multiple changes in line with the development of the nation. Since her early days, Aisyah has been exposed to traditional values, which are rich in local wisdoms, as means to perfecting and appropriating one's position in a Malay society. Therefore, the research makes do with languages and symbols as textual evidences that show conflicting issues of generation gap. The procedure to gather and analyse the evidence would include four steps, namely (1) reading versus using text, (2) data gathering data, (3) text classification and (4) structural analysis versus interpretation. Studying these evidences would consequently allow the understanding the issues regarding the referents (semantics) and into human purposes (pragmatic) as people of different generations do differ in the means and patterns of communication. By employing textual analysis method, the research later analyses the conflicts of generation gap by scrutinising the human psychosocial theory by Erik H. Erikson. As outlined by Erikson, there are eight successive psychosocial stages that every person needs to experience throughout his or her life [21]. Each stage is said to develop within two different contrastive set of qualities that would formulate and design one's being in his society. The eight stages and the qualities are (1) infant (basic trust vs basic mistrust), (2) toddler (autonomy vs shame & doubt), (3) preschooler (initiative vs guilt), (4) school-age (industry vs inferiority), (5) adolescent (identity vs role confusion), (6) young adult (intimacy vs isolation), (7) middle age (generativity

vs stagnation) and (8) older adult (ego-integrity vs despair). As one grows up, he or she needs to adjust himself or herself to the society. Of the two sets of qualities, it is clear that the first would enhance one's ability to adapt himself or herself to the surrounding and make do with everything he or she has got at eight different levels of life [22]. The latter set, in contrast, imposes several difficulties one would encounter as a result of the lacks of determination to move along with changes in life. In other words, the ones who possess the first set of qualities trigger more hopes while those with the latter set of qualities tend to left hopeless and helpless [23] [24].

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The novel tells a story of a local woman, Aisyah, who has been raised up in a family of peasants in rural Kedah during the years of independence. Since a small child, she has been taught the various values as a Malay traditional life, as well as the taboos. She is expected to inherit the values and taboos, and later pass them down to her children once she herself becoming an adult. As revealed in the early part of the story, the elders in the family and neighbourhood keep reminding Aisyah that that would be her job and responsibility to perform and uphold those values throughout her life. It is also clear that in the early part of the story, the roles of Malay men dan women do differ. While a man is expected to lead his own family, as a future husband and father, the woman likewise would be expected to play mere supporting role, as a future wife and mother. Therefore, a young man would likely be given more freedom to experience outside life and learn on their own to mix with the society as one day he is going to be the breadwinner of his own family. A young woman, however, is restricted to be at home. Dictated by her mother, she has to spend more time doing the house chores, such as cooking and sewing, and practically to understand that she would have to be obedient to those who are superiors in the family. It is important to note that in those old days, schooling in Malaysia (formerly Tanah Melayu/Malaya) was not yet compulsory to everyone. Therefore, the lessons for Aisyah to gain come from the ones delivered and dictated by the elder women in her family and neighbourhood, as they are the people she can trust upon. This significantly means that she is literally illiterate. Having been educated solely at home, she can only visualize and interpret things occur before her eyes in the village, without further knowledge on the ongoing world elsewhere. These traditional values, as well as the taboos, can be seen in this excerpt: *Lama-kelamaan Aisyah menganggap dirinya sebagai seorang yang malang, kerana tidak pandai membuat kerja seperti yang dikehendaki oleh ibunya. Namun dia mesti terus membuat kerja-kerja di dapur kerana dia seorang perempuan. Kalau tidak tahu memasak bagaimanakah dia akan hidup kerana orang perempuan mesti berkahwin dan memasak untuk anak-anak dan suaminya. Sebagai seorang anak dia mesti membuat setiap kerja yang disuruh oleh ibu. Sejak kecil lagi dia diajar untuk tidak membantah cakap ibu walau sepetah pun.* (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 12) [Translation] Eventually Aishah felt how unfortunate she was in the family, as she did not really know how to finish the chores. She, however, must work in the kitchen as it was traditionally meant for Malay women. If she could not cook then how could she later served her husband and children? She had to do everything dictated by her mother. Even at tender age, she had been reminded not to disobey her even in a single word. As depicted in the excerpt, it is clear that Aisyah is an inferior character. She does

not really know the ongoing world apart from her family and the neighbourhood. This is due to her sole commitment to house chores from dawn till dusk. In other words, the lack of knowledge has limited her ability to voice out her satisfaction, even the chores are said to torture her mentally. However, at the same time she also knew that this is a regular practice in a Malay society in which women does not have much say in daily life. At the tender age of twelve, the family later believes that Aisyah is now ready to fulfil the role as a wife and a mother. In the old days, a Malay marriage is usually and systematically arranged by the families. Aisyah and Ayob neither have known each other before the marriage nor have the guts to object the arrangement. However, they simply believe that God may bless them as there are some indicators in their traditional surroundings envisage that the marriage would be happy and long-lasting. The marriage itself is a wonderful one as the villagers gather and get involved in the wedding preparation and celebration, yet Aisyah herself does not know anything that will come ahead. In other words, the family decides everything for her. Aisyah is again seen dependent to the elderlies before and after giving birth to her first child. She has to undergo a few traditional rituals, with the beliefs that those practices ease her during her pregnancy as well as giving birth itself. For example, she is asked to chew betelnuts before a midwife of the village attends her. As for the taboos, such example is that she cannot deliberately stand at the front door of her house, as it would cause difficulty when she delivers the baby. Becoming a young mother, Aisyah dares not to disobey such things as they have been passed down for long by her ancestors. In return, she is expected to do the same things to her children in the future. The belief is strongly cemented in her in the excerpt: "Ikutlah cakap orang tua-tua kerana orang tua semata-mata hendak menjaga kita. Kita masih mentah dan tidak tahu apa-apa." Selain daripada cerita Kak Long, ramai juga jiran yang bercerita itu dan ini kononnya hendak memberikan nasihat. Ada yang menyuruh Aisyah buat begini ada yang kata buat begitu. Ada yang nasihatkan supaya bekerja kuat, jangan ikut-ikut sangat rasa tak larat kerana kalau kita buat kerja berat-berat dan angkat berat-berat boleh memudahkan sedikit apabila hendak bersalin (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 110) [Translation: "We should listen to the elderlies because they care about us. We are green and know nothing." Besides Kak Long, the other neighbours also recited stories as well, as if they really wanted to give her advise. Some asked Aisyah to do these, and some other asked her to do those. Some neighbours even advised her to keep working hard and pretending being strong, as if they will ease her when giving birth to baby] The above excerpt still portrays Aisyah at her teenage years as a more inferior and confused character. As regularly practised in the Malay society at that time, Aisyah soon destined to be marry to Ayob, a local she never knows or mets before the marriage. Being a young wife, however, still does not permit Aisyah to live independently. She still has to listen to advices from her mother and the elderlies, especially during pregnancy, since they see her as a weak and frail person. In the early years of the marriage, the novel reveals that life is not becoming easier for the young couple. Aisyah and Ayob imitate the roles of their elderly by labouring more time in padi fields and small farms. As a result, they similarly gain small sum of money for consumption. Yet, they still manage to build a small wooden house near Aisyah's family's house. The novel implies that Aisyah is blessed to have Ayob as her husband. Having had some basic in Arabic and Islamic

education, Ayob enrolls in a teacher training programme and to serve to the government. Therefore, Aisyah has to play a more vital role in the family. She solely works harder at the fields and farms to meet ends and also to pay for Ayob's books at the training centre. The workload of both pays off as Ayob was elected as a school teacher working in suburb of Sungai Petani, a nearby town. This also means that they have to leave the village and move to a new house in the suburb. Living there, Aisyah practices life as a housewife and no longer work in the fields and farms. However, as the time passes by, their children have grown up as well. They both see that the state of living in a suburb provides good opportunity to send the children to school, as Ayob himself, now an educator, determines that they have better education. Seeing the greener side of life, Aisyah does not object. She now has the belief that the children must strive for their future. By monitoring their progress too, she does realise that it in a way it will help her gaining some knowledge she missed during her childhood days. These new beliefs can be seen in the excerpts: Suatu petang Ayob memberitahu, "Aisyah, kerajaan ada membuka kelas agama di Kota Kuala Muda. Sesiapa yang pernah pergi ke sekolah agama bolehlah minta belajar di sana. Khabarnya, kerajaan akan membuka banyak sekolah agama untuk budak-budak dan hendak mengambil orang untuk menjadi guru. Saya dulu ada mengaji pondok di Simpang Empat. Saya rasa hendak cuba meminta, ambil periksa. Kalau lulus peperiksaan itu boleh jadi guru agama. Mana tahu kalau-kalau nasib kita baik. Kalau rezeki anak-anak kita baik, dapatlah saya jadi guru agama, insya-Allah." (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 139) [Translation] One evening Ayob said, "Aisyah, the government had just opened religious classes in Kota Kuala Muda. Those who had gone to religious school may apply for the entrance (at the new institution). I heard that the government would establish many religious school to cater the needs of the students and they want to employ more teachers. I did go to a religious school in Simpang Empat once. I wish to try my luck in the exam. If I pass then I would be a teacher. Who knows we might be the lucky ones. May God bless us, and our kids, one day I can be a teacher, Insya-Allah." Sedikit sebanyak fikiran Aisyah terganggu juga oleh cakap-cakap orang di sekeliling. Kadang-kadang dia dihantui perasaan curiga terhadap anak-anak perempuan yang sedang membesar itu. Kalaulah mereka melakukan sesuatu yang tidak baik seperti yang dibayangkan oleh Kak Long itu, bagaimanakah dia akan menghadapinya. Apabila mendengar cakap-cakap Ayob, dia mendapat kekuatan dan keyakinan semula, lalu memberikan sokongan kepada cita-cita Ayob untuk memberikan pelajar kepada anak-anak perempuan mereka. (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 159 – 160). [Translation: Sometimes the empty talk irritated Aisyah. Sometimes she was even suspected her own daughters. What if they really commit such nuisances predicted by Kak Long? And if so, how would she accept the rumors? Yet after Ayob calming her down, she regained the strength, the confidence, and together they determine to ensure their daughters to receive even better education] These two excerpts above indicate that Aisyah is beginning to experience a new phase of life when she is becoming older. As an adult, and a fortunate one to marry a wise, aspiring and determined man, Aisyah soon realises that education provides vast opportunity for her children to prosper. Like her mother, she still dictates her daughters with the same values to her daughters. Unlike her mother, however, she understands that being literate and educated may help her daughters to prosper in future.

Amid the mutual understanding of both Aisyah and Ayub, the novel reveals that the progress of the first two daughters at school once halted. Aisyah's mother is adamant that Malay women should assume the traditional roles, as she and Aisyah did previously, and demands Aisyah's daughters to remain at home. Reluctantly, Aisyah has to agree with her mother. As a result, Jamilah and Latifah do not go to the secondary school. Only Hamid and the other son, Aziz, do and are still able to achieve their ambitions. Jamilah and Latifah then are destined to follow the steps of the mother and grandmother, by getting married at the teenage years to men they never know. However, the fact that they previously engaged with schooling provides better opportunities for Jamilah and Latifah to seeing life in bigger pictures, as their far better educated husbands tend toward modern living styles. The husbands themselves are attached to government sectors, earning good salary, thus prefer to work and settle down in bigger towns, namely Butterworth and Alor Setar in the novel. Due to this, Jamilah and Latifah are unlikely to stay near to their parents, as Aisyah and Ayob did in their first few years of marriage. Aisyah is more disturbed when Jamilah's husband ignores her wish for her daughter to undergo the same traditional ritual when they are expecting their first child. Moreover, they prefer doctors in hospital to midwife in village. Unlike the obedient Aisyah, Jamilah feels that she is not bound to taboos of the old days any more. Jamilah dares to question her mother who forbids her from sweeping floor, by assessing any possibility that the action might harm her baby, as portrayed in the excerpt below: Apabila Aisyah melarangnya daripada menyapu sampah atau membuat sesuatu, dia akan bertanya, "Kalau saya menyapu juga apa akan jadi pada saya mak?" (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 207) [Translation: Whenever Aisyah forbid her from sweeping floor or anything else considered taboo in the Malay custom, she will quickly raised question, "I wonder what will happen to me if I keep sweeping the floor, mak?" The excerpt above indicates that at some later parts of life, Aisyah cannot be more adamant to her daughters anymore. She is often left with total despair whenever the more educated daughter seeks for scientific and methodological answers, the ones she knows than she can never provide for her. Meanwhile, Hamid and Aziz totally have different ideas on marriage. Unlike their sisters, they choose their own bride, who possess equal academic achievement and suit their thinking style. To Aisyah, her elder son, Hamid is the more unthinkable one, as he chooses a Chinese woman converted to Islam as his spouse. The sons too have good jobs in Kuala Lumpur, the capital of Malaysia, therefore require them to settle down there as well. To Aisyah's dismay, her youngest child, Rohani, the only daughter who she vows to be allowed to study the furthest, opts to work in Kuala Lumpur like her brothers. In other words, none of her five children show intention to live in Sungai Petani. The novel also notes that Aisyah is even lonelier than ever after the death of Ayob when performing Haj in Mecca. Her children and grandchildren now occasionally return home, notably during the Hari Raya Aidil Fitri festivities and school holidays. However, such gatherings which are supposed to be long-awaited ones somehow may turn sour as Aisyah's grandchildren keep complaining on the lack of amenities in her house. The lack of these, such as electricity, prevent the granddaughters; Azizah, Rodiah and Anisah, from watching television. At their own homes, Aisyah then turns out to be the one who feels hard done by. For example, Aisyah insists that boys and girls should not mix as such action is against the Malay values, even for

studying for examinations. However, her daughters simply neglects her as can be seen in the excerpt: Akan tetapi hidup Aisyah sudah berbeza daripada kehidupan ibu. Ibu dulu dapat duduk bersama-sama anak-anak hingga anak-anak dewasa dan berkahwin. Selepas berkahwin pun kebanyakan mereka masih tinggal berdekatan. Cucu-cucu bermain di sekeliling rumah. Namun, Aisyah harus berpisah dengan anak-anak walaupun anak-anaknya masih muda. (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 212) [Translation: Aisyah sensed the difference of her life and her mother's. Her mother enjoyed privileges seeing the children becoming adults and getting married. Even after the marriages, they still wanted to live nearby. The grandchildren were all having fun around the house. Aisyah, however, had been left alone at home from the very beginning when her own children started to flourish]. Sejak dulu lagi, dia memendam rasa melihat cara Rasyid membesarkan anak-anaknya. Azizah, Rodiah, Anisah dibiarkan bergaul bebas dengan budak-budak lelaki sehingga malam pun ada budak lelaki yang datang ke rumah. Aisyah cuba menegur tetapi kata-katanya tidak pernah didengari dan dipatuhi. Aisyah berasakan dirinya sebagai orang tua yang tidak berguna (Zurinah Hassan, 2016: 223). [Translation: Aisyah never liked the way Rasyid raised up the children. Azizah, Rodiah, Anisah were all free to mix up with boys, and even some of them came to the house at dusk. Aisyah reprimanded her son-in-law many times, but her words fell on deaf ears. Aisyah suddenly felt useless. As depicted in the two excerpts above, Aisyah has never emerged as a dominant character even as an old woman. Even though she tries to replicate her mother uncompromising stances in issues related to the Malay customs, it is always clear that she never has firm and solid control over current issues. Each children has different path of life and each has fully understanding that to survive the ongoing and changing world, each needs to make decisions that obviously will never suit Aisyah's intention anymore. Therefore, Aisyah again is left in despair, wondering how the world has created more and more gaps between them.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the accumulated discussions above, it is clear that 'generation gap' turns to be a vital issue in the novel. There are four groups of different generation being highlighted in the story. Each group perceives different beliefs, thoughts, values and tastes which circulated in their surroundings within one particular range of time. The first group is represented by Aisyah's mother and the elderlies in the village. They strongly uphold the traditional values without questioning, for the reason they lack of knowledge and understanding of the ongoing world. The second group is represented by Aisyah herself, who is in decline as the opportunity to search for knowledge for those living in the countryside is limited. Aisyah just realizes about the changes in the ongoing world after sharing life with Ayub, who determines to ensure their children being more knowledgeable. The third group is represented by Aisyah's sons and daughters; some have been school dropouts and some do excel in education, but together they see the ongoing world differently from their ancestors, thus willing to take every possible opportunity that would benefit them. The mixture of the traditional values and the modern values at some stages cause confusion as Aisyah's children start questioning her whether or not the traditional lifestyles suit the modern ones. Finally, the last group is represented by Aisyah's grandchildren. They are more obliged to the ongoing world. Despite the respect to the elderlies and the traditional values being upheld, they

determine to withstand the modern lifestyles. Every group apparently installs and develops its own beliefs, thoughts, values and tastes at different surrounding at different time, thus enhance conflicts when coming together to solution for any difficult situation. Aisyah, the main character of the novel remains the attraction, as she portrays the role of a woman who is trapped in the changing and challenging Malay society. At first, she appears to be an understudy for her mother, to later mentor her own children, yet emerges as the one burdened with conflicts. Once timid, pessimist and simply obedient, she first demonstrates controls when instilling the same values to the children. These have been gradually overturned once the children are equipped with better education. Unlike her mother, who remains in control until her death, Aisyah is emotionally distanced as it is clear even the grandchildren exhibit their interest to the modern lifestyles. This state of feeling arises mainly because of the improvement of education in Malaysia, the influence of modernization and thus the gradual decline of traditional values. In a nutshell, and as generation gap remains the centre of the discussion, it is obvious that the more the younger generations accustomed to the social changes, then the wider the generation gap would be. This hence resulting on the more possibilities emotional distance occur among the older generations who are still bound to the inheritance.

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